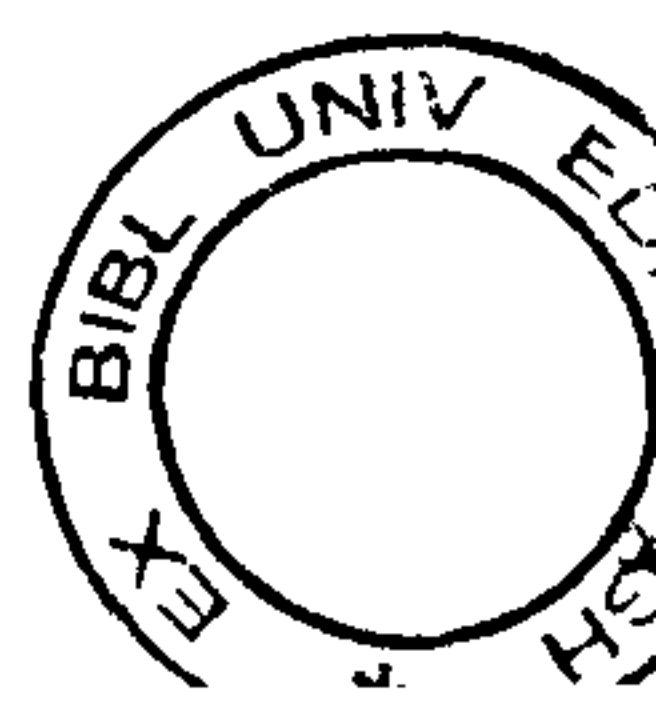


**THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED:
CONVERSATIONS WITH SURVIVORS**

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2006**



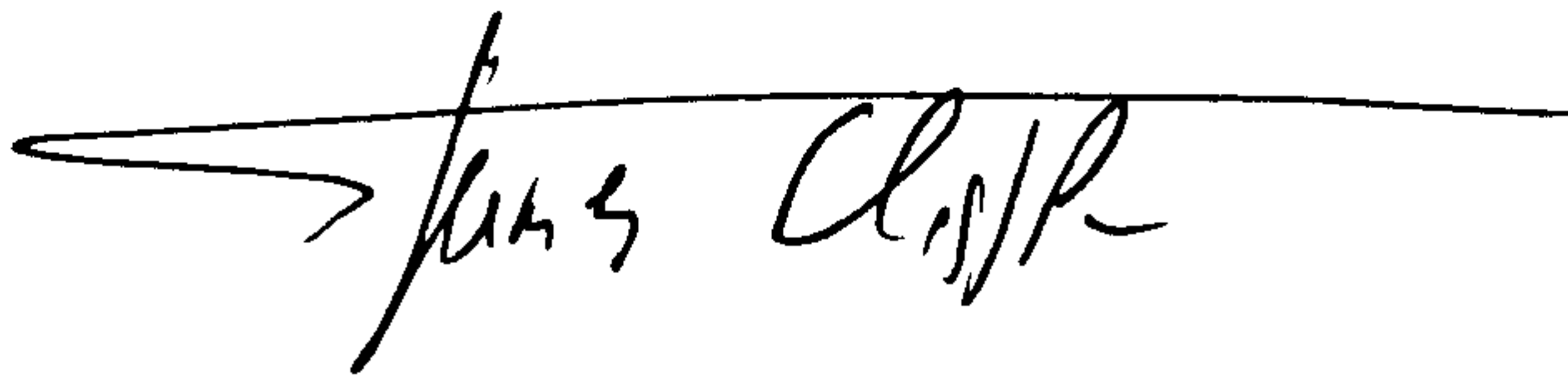
Abstract

This thesis is based upon a series of interviews conducted with thirty survivors of the siege of Leningrad (1941-44). The interviews took place in Edinburgh, Newcastle and St. Petersburg between 2003 and 2006. The conversations were recorded onto cassette. They were then compared with over three hundred additional recently published siege testimonies.

The premise of the thesis is that across the decades the siege of Leningrad has been mythologised both in historiography and in public and private memories. Rather than seeking to detach this phenomenon from facts and data it is analysed as a key facet of the story of the blockade. It is also stated that Giorgio Agamben's concept of the ambivalence of the sacred through embracing both the sacred and the profane provides a fresh analytical tool for the study of siege memories. This is because it brings together myths of heroism associated with the blockade and stories covering acts of cannibalism and war profiteering. These extremes of human behaviour are not regarded as mutually exclusive but as intrinsic parts of siege mythology. Consequently, profane stories merely serve to underline the overall sacrality of siege testimonies.

Declaration

I declare that apart from quotations and references which are listed in the footnotes this thesis is entirely my own work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Clapperton', is written over a horizontal line.

James Clapperton

Acknowledgements

The thesis is dedicated to the courage and fortitude of the thirty survivors of the siege of Leningrad who were interviewed. Listening to their stories was a deeply moving and humbling experience.

I would like to thank my wife Sharleen and my parents for their constant support and encouragement throughout the duration of my studies. In addition, I am grateful for the guidance and patience of my supervisor Professor Larissa Ryazanova-Clarke. The assistance of Dr. Dirk Uffelmann and Michael Falchikov was invaluable. I am particularly thankful for the friendship of Marianna Taymanova and Pavel Dolokhov who took an interest in my thesis at a crucial juncture. Dr. Jane Goldman and Gus McLean provided moral support, advice and encouragement throughout my studies. The guidance of John Gooding in the History Department at Edinburgh was also a fundamental motivator behind the progress of the thesis.

Finally, the support and comradeship of all my friends in St. Petersburg was vital for the completion of my studies. I would like to thank Julia Andreeva, Alla Borisova, Zhanna Kormina, Asia Nesterovskaia, Aleksandr and Vadim Radvilovich, Irina Rodionova, Ol'ga Sharaia, Sergei Tchirkov and the staff at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.



Figures 1-4: The author with veterans from the *Elektrosila* plant.
 The author with *Aleksandr Cherapukhin*, *Viktor Lodkin*, *Natalia Velezhova* and *Julia Andreeva*.
 The author with veterans from *Kolpino*.
 The iconic sign warning citizens that during shelling this side of the street is more dangerous. (All photos were taken in September 2006).

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THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED: CONVERSATIONS WITH SURVIVORS

The following thesis is based upon interviews conducted with thirty survivors of the siege of Leningrad. This produced around sixteen hours of discussions which were recorded onto cassette. These interviews were then compared with over three hundred additional testimonies published recently in Russian books, journals and transcripts of radio broadcasts. Subsequently, a picture could be compiled of the themes and issues with which siege survivors are currently concerned.

It became clear following the analysis of these testimonies and siege historiography that the blockade has been defined both in historical texts and in personal recollections as a sacred theme. In the words of Lisa A. Kirschenbaum the siege is 'one of those events that are immediately invested with symbolic significance and treated, even as they are unfolding, as if they are being commemorated in advance'¹. One respondent, retired submariner Viktor Lodkin made this point very clearly, 'How can I discuss the siege in two hours? This is our sacred theme'².

¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum: 'Commemorations of the siege of Leningrad: a catastrophe in memory and myth', in *The Memory of Catastrophe* (edited by Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver, Manchester UP, 2004), 106-17 (p. 106).

² Interviews with Viktor Lodkin, Natalia Velezhova and Aleksandr Cherapukhin, *Assotsiatsiia Invalidov, Veteranov i Blokadnikov*, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, 1-32, transcript, p. 3. The actual names of the respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms. Refer also to the Oral History Society website and the section entitled 'Practical Advice' < <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/> > [accessed 12/12/06].

It also became evident during the interviews that the siege remained a source of heated debate and various rumours and myths. For example, the bombing of the Badaev warehouses in September 1941 is still regarded by many survivors to be the soul cause of the famine even though historical documentation has proved otherwise³.

In addition, a number of respondents were adamant that German spies had infiltrated the city and had fired off green rockets to reveal the location of hospitals and other key buildings. Daniil Granin and Ales' Adamovich in their book *Blokadnaia Kniga* state that there is no hard evidence to support this story yet the rumours continue⁴. A story also circulated in the Russian press recently that a train of cats was sent into Leningrad in the spring of 1942 in an effort to reduce the number of rats in the city. Again, historians argue that there is no documentation which confirms this story. Nevertheless, two statues of cats have recently been erected in St. Petersburg⁵.

These myths could easily be dismissed as rumours but their continued prevalence today is remarkable considering that it is now over sixty years since the siege was lifted in January 1944. It is also clear that by dispensing

³ Refer to the chapter entitled, 'The Red Eclipse: The Myth of the Badaev Warehouses', pp. 3-4.

⁴ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga (The Book of the Blockade)*, St. Petersburg: *Nezavisimoe Izdatel'stvo "PIK"*, 2003), pp. 299-300.

⁵ Elena Rotkevitch, 'Bronze Monument to a Cat', *The St. Petersburg Times*, 23 January 2004. <www.spb.ru> [accessed 1/02/2006]. See also, 'In Defence of Myth: The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative', pp. 39-40.

with the mythology contained within siege narratives a fundamental aspect of blockade testimony would be lost. On the other hand, despite Kirschenbaum's observation stated above that the siege has been a source of resilient mythologies from the outset this aspect of blockade discourse has never been thoroughly examined as a phenomenon in itself.

Kirschenbaum herself has gone some way to rectifying this in her recent book: *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad: Myth, Memories and Monuments*⁶.

Nevertheless, there are key differences between her study and the findings presented in this thesis. Kirschenbaum focuses partly upon siege memorials and monuments as a key signifier in how commemoration of the blockade has been presented whereas oral testimony forms the fundamental basis of this thesis. Kirschenbaum also examines representations of the siege in myth, memories and monuments leading up to 1995 while the focus of this study is placed upon statements made by survivors during the last five years.

The key question for Russian scholars of the siege has been whether revelations about acts of cannibalism and war profiteering committed by Leningraders undermine the Soviet myth of the 'hero city'. Daniil Granin was troubled during the early 1990's when, as a result of relaxations in censorship he was able to publish stories which covered these topics. In the end he resolved to

⁶ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad: Myth, Memories and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).

go ahead publish and they now form the basis of two additional chapters which were subsequently included in the most recent edition of *Blokadnaia Kniga* published in 2003⁷.

It is the premise of this thesis that Granin's fears were unfounded. The heroism and fortitude shown by Leningrad's citizens during the siege is irrefutable. It is also the case that tales depicting siege deprivation throw stories of 'heroism into sharper relief'. In addition, permitting a 'truer, or at least darker, picture of the circumstances in Leningrad' to emerge does not necessarily imply a rejection of the epic narrative of the siege⁸.

Correspondingly, books such as Nikita Lomagin's *Neizvestnaia Blokada* (The Unknown Blockade) which have released various NKVD files charting crimes of cannibalism actually underline the challenges which Leningraders faced⁹. As Boris Belozerov states, there were in reality only just over 15,000 arrests made between July 1941 and July 1943. Belozerov regards this figure as remarkably low¹⁰. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to state that criminal activities were committed by anything more than a small minority of Leningrad's citizens.

⁷ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Glavy, Kotorykh ne Bylo, Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 487-505. See also Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...*, p. 239 and 'Between Myth and History: Siege Historiography' (p. 40).

⁸ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* pp. 234-35.

⁹ Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada* (Sankt Peterburg: Neva, 2002).

¹⁰ Boris Belozerov 'Crime during the Siege', in *Life And Death in Besieged Leningrad: 1941-44*, edited by John Barber and Andrei Dzeniskevich (London: Palgrave – Macmillan, 2005) pp. 226-27. See also 'Between Myth and History...' (pp. 30-31).

Giorgio Agamben's concept of the ambivalence of the sacred as presented in his book: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* can bring these apparently opposing strands of siege discourse together¹¹. It was also notable during the interviews that survivors themselves showed no desire to avoid darker siege topics because they did not regard Leningrad's wartime criminals as representative of the wider population. In fact, respondents such as Ol'ga Rozanova and Natalia Velezhova discussed the topic of cannibalism in great depth and clearly regarded it as a theme which emphasised the perils of siege life¹².

Agamben proposes an approach which apprehends the sacred and the profane as mutually dependent¹³. Consequently, the myth of the 'hero city' and the sacrality of siege discourse far from being undermined by gruesome tales of Leningrad's underworld are actually emboldened by these stories. In addition, describing siege testimonies as sacred narrative is entirely appropriate because survivors like Viktor Lodkin and others constantly refer to the blockade as their 'sacred theme'.

Ol'ga Rozanova entered into the mythology of the siege with the following words, 'What does it mean, the siege? Well, it is difficult to describe everything to you because you did not survive this. It is above all, hunger...it is cold...'¹⁴

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), p. 78.

¹² BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 19.

¹³ Same as footnote no. 11.

¹⁴ Interview with Ol'ga Rozanova, St. Petersburg, September 2006, 1-25 tape reference, BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 1.

Others, such as Aleksandra Arkhipova and Tat'iana Letenkova referred to the bombing of the Badaev warehouses as a defining event. The myth surrounding the significance of the bombing formed a central plinth in their testimonies¹⁵.

Rozanova, like Lodkin was somewhat intimidated by broaching the subject of the blockade. It appeared almost too immense to begin to describe. Iurii Semeonovich, a retired employee of the *Elektrosila* plant in the south of the city also stated that it was impossible for outsiders to fully understand the realities of life in besieged Leningrad¹⁶.

Experience of mutual suffering expressed in Russian as *sostradanie* is a key aspect of how this community is defined and imagined by its members¹⁷. Survivors stress repeatedly that only they themselves can fully comprehend the meaning of the word *blokada*¹⁸. In this regard, it is easy to understand why they refer so resolutely to a range of siege myths, focussing on topics such as patriotism, acts of self-sacrifice and heroism and above all the myth of a united wartime community¹⁹.

¹⁵ Letenkova began her testimony, 'Well, first of all the Badaev warehouses burned down'. Interview with Tat'iana Letenkova, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, 1-38, transcript, p. 1.

¹⁶ Interview with Iurii Semeonovich, *Elektrosila* plant, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, 1-31, transcript, p. 11.

¹⁷ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1994), p. 3.

¹⁸ Viktor Lodkin doubted initially whether he could discuss the subject at all with an outsider. BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 4.

¹⁹ Refer also to, 'In Defence of Myth: The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative', pp. 6-7.

These stories are interlinked with graphic details depicting violent deaths due to shelling, starvation, acts of cannibalism and chaos at the front²⁰. Such tales form the underbelly of this vast sacred narrative. They also confirm Agamben's observation that the 'sacred is also damned'²¹. Agamben notes that in the modern age every individual has the potential to become a *homo sacer*²². The present Russian government sends postcards signed by President Putin to *blokadniki* and eulogises their wartime service in language clearly couched in sacral terms²³. Putin has even referred to commemorative occasions as 'sacred holidays'²⁴. In this regard, each passing Russian administration seeks to identify itself with the myth of the siege thereby perpetuating the epic narrative of the 'hero city'²⁵.

Siege survivors do not necessarily reject the state's canonisation of them as *homines sacri*. The relationship between their statements and government propaganda is a complex one. The respondents interviewed in the town of

²⁰ Respondents interviewed in Kolpino which lies to the south of St. Petersburg found themselves caught up in some of the fiercest fighting of the siege. Refer also to Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941-45* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1964), p. 287. Werth states that from the outset of the siege the Germans were 'attacking heavily' around Kolpino.

²¹⁻²² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*..., pp. 78-79.

²³ The respondent Elena Vishnevskaja brought one of these cards to her interview. Interview with *Elena Vishnevskaja*, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, 1-22, BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR.

²⁴ Irina Titova, 'President Marks Siege Anniversary in the City', St. Petersburg Times, 30 January 2004, issue no. 939 (7) <www.spb.ru> [accessed 1/02/2006].

²⁵ The words '*Gorod Gerói*' or 'The Hero City' are displayed in huge letters on top of one of the buildings beside *Ploshchad' Vosstaniia* in the centre of St. Petersburg.

Kolpino for example, interspersed wartime slogans such as, ‘For the Motherland! For Stalin!’ and ‘Everything for the Front! Everything for Victory!’ with intensely personal statements²⁶. While their testimonies often revealed topics which would have been censored during the Soviet era they did not reject Soviet historiography as inaccurate. It was rather that they sought to provide additional details to the Soviet myth of war, thereby emphasising further the heroism of the local populace.

Agamben states that while we all have the potential to become *homines sacri* in the modern age we are also exposed to unprecedented violence. He regards the ultimate expression of this brutality as the Holocaust²⁷. The testimonies provided by the veterans in Kolpino describe life close to the front line. Their stories graphically depict the cruel realities of war around Leningrad. This was a campaign for which as Theo J. Schulte states, ‘The German Army was ‘geared up’ to allow for the maximum use of force and this, in turn, made a significant contribution to the barbarism of the conflict’²⁸.

The epic narrative of the ‘hero city’ is also underlined by the fact that this was a ‘battle of annihilation’ or ‘*vernichtungsschlacht*’. The German command implemented a ‘deliberate extermination policy’ or ‘*einer*

²⁶ Refer to “Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!” Myths of Patriotism in Contemporary Siege Testimony’ (p. 8).

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer*...p. 114.

²⁸ Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd., 1989), p. 291.

bewusspraktizierten vernichtungspolitik’ aimed at wiping out the city’s population²⁹. In this regard, the canonisation of Leningraders as *homines sacri* was almost inevitable. As Northrop Frye states, *agon* (conflict) is followed by *pathos* or death struggle which ultimately leads to *agnorisis* (discovery) and a moment of personal revelation which confirms ‘the recognition of the hero’³⁰.

Correspondingly, the apparent contradiction between accounts such as Lomagin’s which reveal the siege’s darker side and the Soviet myth of war is a misnomer. While the post-Communist era has opened up the possibility for veterans to reject various Soviet mythologies, in reality, almost all of these respondents remain attached to the values of the previous era. As the respondent Svetlana Gachina simply stated, ‘I love the Soviet Union’³¹. Interestingly, she referred to the Soviet Union in the present tense.

Agamben’s theory outlining the ambivalence of the sacred enables us to apprehend different strands of siege discourse as interdependent and not as mutually exclusive. It is also the premise of this thesis that myth performs a positive role in siege testimony. *Blokadniki* refer to a range of siege myths primarily as a means of explaining their pasts and not as a strategy deployed in order to avoid discussion of uncomfortable topics.

²⁹ Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army...* p. 87.

³⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 187. See also ‘In Defence of Myth...’ (p. 46).

³¹ Interview with *Svetlana Gachina*, St. Petersburg, July 2003, BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, 1-32, transcript, p. 15.

As they suffered loss of friends and relatives and endured relentless shelling, starvation and acute depravation Leningraders may well have regarded themselves as cursed. Yet the siege brought out the true potential of humanity and revealed both its most admirable and deplorable characteristics. The perception of Leningraders as *homines sacri* is therefore ultimately dependent upon stories of heroism *and* of reminiscences depicting the true horrors of the siege. Above all, the sacred power of siege mythology emerges from the knowledge of what it is like to ‘live one’s death in the everyday, to confront it, and to assume it’³². *Blokadniki* share this knowledge with one another as well as various stories which chart the spiritual journey from *agon* to *agnorisis*. As Ol’ga Rozanova succinctly stated, ‘*Vy ne predstavlaete!*’ - ‘You simply cannot imagine it!’³³

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The chapters contained within the thesis seek to apply Agamben’s theory of the ambivalence of the sacred to the study of siege testimony. In addition, the discussion provides a detailed analysis of the various stories, myths and rumours which form the essence of siege discourse as sacred narrative.

The opening chapter examines siege historiography and presents a wider historical background for readers unacquainted with the history of the blockade. This discussion is followed by an examination of the potential of oral testimony

³² N. Wyatt, ‘The Mythic Mind’, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 15.1 (2001), 3-61 (pp. 8-9).

³³ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 1.

as well as a discussion of current debates within the field of oral history.

The aim is to construct an approach to the study of oral history which is both contemporary and informed.

The content of the interviews, the interviewing method deployed and the questions which were put to survivors is then examined. This chapter is followed by an analysis of over three hundred recent siege testimonies in order to provide the thesis with a broader framework. In addition, these two chapters present various blockade stories and myths which are not covered elsewhere in the thesis.

There then follows an extended study of myth theory and an analysis of how the premise of this thesis corresponds with recent discussions in that field.

Myth is regarded within the context of this study as a didactic force which underpins and illuminates key aspects of siege testimony. The chapter examining myth theory therefore takes a clear stance within the overall debate surrounding the potential of myth theory and seeks to rehabilitate myth as a determining factor in blockade narratives.

Patriotism is a salient theme within siege testimony and it was consequently deemed necessary to provide a comprehensive study of *blokadnikis'* statements on this topic. Again, the analysis proceeds with reference to contemporary debates surrounding the topics of both patriotism and nationalism

as a means of rendering the discussion relevant to recent developments in this area. The chapter concludes that *blokadnikis'* statements on this topic demonstrate that their patriotic values are determined primarily by local concerns and that they sought above all during wartime to defend family, friends, their local environment and their city. Broader patriotic or nationalist urges, and even Communist ideology were backgrounded. Nevertheless, the image of Stalin still appeared to retain great resonance for these groups of survivors.

This chapter is followed by an analysis of the wartime topography of besieged Leningrad. Siege testimonies are primarily memories of the senses. Consequently, the sights, sounds and smells of the 900 days are presented as well as an examination of how sensory memories can trigger flashbacks leading to vivid recollections of wartime experiences.

Together, these chapters form the largest section of the thesis and they are followed by shorter discussions analysing stories which recall the Badaev bombing and the *doroga zhizni* or *road of life*. It seemed appropriate to place the chapter examining the ice road across lake Ladoga towards the end of the thesis as these narratives chart the experience of evacuation and of crossing the threshold between siege life and the outside world.

Finally, the discussion moves into the present era by examining *blokadnikis'* attitudes towards the current Russian administration and the subject of

monetizatsiia which refers to recent controversial reforms in the benefit system. Survivors were also asked about whether they felt their achievements were recognised amongst younger Russian generations. In general, they regarded this question as a means of asserting that their generation had a special character and that the enormous challenges they faced during wartime could not be withstood by St. Petersburgers today. These discussions revealed that nostalgia is a key element in the mythopoetic thought processes which define siege testimony.

The conclusion attempts to bring together the various themes presented in the overall discussion as well as presenting a verdict upon the applicability of Agamben's thesis to the study of siege testimony. The general aim of the thesis was to utilise myth theory as a means of analysing *blokadnikis'* belief-systems. It is also stated that de-mythologising siege narrative would result in an 'illegitimate reductionism' of the essence of their stories³⁴.

These narratives were at times extremely moving and even disturbing to listen to. Nevertheless, all the respondents were keen to discuss their experiences in considerable detail. As they come towards the end of their lives it is also clear that opportunities for them to relate their stories are diminishing. Within this context oral history has a fundamental role to play. It enables us to appreciate and understand *blokadnikis'* narratives and ultimately has the potential of bringing us closer to comprehending the realities of life as it was experienced during the 900 days.

³⁴ N. Wyatt, 'The Mythic Mind' (p. 50).

BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY: SIEGE HISTORIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION:

SOVIET MYTHOCRACY VERSUS EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS

David M. Glantz wrote that 'In terms of drama, symbolism, and sheer human suffering...the Battle for Leningrad and its associated blockade has no peer either in the Great Patriotic War or modern war'¹. Harrison Salisbury concurs with this view and opens his comprehensive study of the blockade with the following sentiment, 'Each passing year deepens our realisation of the triumph of man's spirit marked by the survival of the great city of Leningrad under the 900 day siege...'² Glantz and Salisbury both emphasise the fact that as a historic event, the siege of Leningrad is without parallel.

A similar point is made by Bruce W. Lincoln who states that there is simply 'no way of comparing the siege of Leningrad with those endured by any other modern cities'³. He underlines this assertion by reminding his readers that during one day in either January, February or March 1942 more people perished in Leningrad than in the entire siege of Vicksburg during the American Civil War. The siege of Paris which began in September 1870 lasted for just over four months and despite food shortages Parisians' privations were mitigated somewhat by ample stocks of fine wine⁴.

¹ David M. Glantz, *The Battle for Leningrad 1941-44* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 470.

² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Limited, 1969), introduction, p. vii.

³⁻⁴ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight: St. Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia* (The Perseus Press, Oxford, 2001), p. 290.

The reality that the siege of Leningrad bears no comparison with any other blockade in history means that even a bare statement of the facts appears to belong to the realms of the mythopoetic imagination. Whether one believes the official Soviet estimate that 632,253 Leningraders perished during the siege or the Leningrad Funeral Trust's figure of 1.2 million deaths the toll of human suffering was immense⁵. As John Barber states, 'Leningrad suffered the greatest demographic catastrophe ever experienced by one city in the history of mankind'⁶.

The tragedy of the siege has been depicted through a plethora of books, articles, memoirs and radio and television programmes both in Russia and in the West. From the outset tensions arose between officially proscribed Soviet master narratives focussing upon heroism and military exploits and local stories which placed the activities of ordinary Leningraders centrestage. Lisa A. Kirschenbaum notes this by stating that 'Wartime propaganda had emphasised the local and private loyalties that made sacrifice meaningful and urgent'. Yet, by 1945 'efforts to universalise the Leningrad epic by reconnecting it to Soviet patriotism marked the limits of official tolerance of local pride and identity'⁷.

As an illustration of this point she mentions the visit of politburo member Giorgii Malenkov to the newly opened Museum of the Defence of Leningrad in February

⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 517 and Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 122.

⁶ 'Introduction: Leningrad's Place in the History of Famine' in *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad, 1941-44*, edited by John Barber and Andrei Dzeniskevich (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005), p. 1.

⁷ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...*p. 141.

1947. Incensed by exhibits which represented primarily the achievements of the local population he was said to have exclaimed, '(The museum) has created a myth of Leningrad's special 'blockade' fate! It has minimised the role of the great Stalin!'⁸ Both Salisbury and Kirschenbaum chart the process by which Moscow sought to reassert its authority over Leningrad by attempting to erase 'the scars of war and local commemorations of it'⁹. The museum itself was subsequently closed down in 1949¹⁰.

In this regard, a powerful mythocracy emerged during the Soviet period which ensured that siege narratives were focused upon a broad picture of military tactics and the marriage of local patriotism with Communist ideology. Grigorii Tulchinsky provides a useful description of this process. He describes mythocracy within the Soviet context as a conflagration of 'myth' and 'power' which attempts to 'explain certain facts of Soviet reality and culture'¹¹. He proceeds to define it within sacral terms as a 'unique spiritual orientation'. Consequently, through its 'self-fulfilling repetition of shamanistic incantations' Stalinist thought transforms 'state consciousness into the ideology of an all-pervasive system'. The epic tale of the siege of Leningrad

⁸ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 14.

⁹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 147.

¹⁰ Salisbury maintained that 'without notice or public announcement, the museum of the Defence of Leningrad was closed'. The museum's director Major Rakov was also subsequently arrested. Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 579.

¹¹ Grigorii Tulchinsky, 'Culture and Mythocracy' in *Re-entering the Sign: Articulating New Russian Culture*, edited by Ellen E. Berry and Anesa Miller-Podacar (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 62-78, p. 62.

could therefore only be told within defined parameters stressing Soviet 'heroism and meaningful sacrifice'¹².

It would be misleading though to depict siege histories written during the Soviet era as uniformly rigid. Certainly, many accounts by Soviet historians focus upon wartime strategical thinking, battles and troop movements while paying scant attention to life itself in besieged Leningrad. A. V Burov's *Tvoi Geroi Leningrad* and D. B Bychebskii's *Gorod Front* are notable examples¹³. These studies present master narratives which reflect the thoughts and concerns of Soviet generals and high ranking officers as opposed to those of ordinary citizens.

In *Geroicheskii Leningrad* V. E Zubakov sets clear boundaries for what he regards as acceptable Soviet historiography. He accompanies these guidelines with a scathing attack upon Harrison Salisbury's book: *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* by branding it 'bourgeois falsification'. He was particularly offended by chapters with headings such as 'The City of Death' and 'The City of Ice' which he dismissed as, 'Imperialist propaganda' and an attempt 'to belittle the worldwide historical achievements of the Soviet people'¹⁴. Salisbury, according to Zubakov, had strayed from the path set out by Soviet mythocracy through providing too graphic a picture of Leningraders' suffering.

¹² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...*p.183.

¹³ A.V Burov, *Tvoi Geroi Leningrad* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1970) and D. B Bychebskii, *Gorod Front* (Leningrad: Lenizdat 1967).

¹⁴ V.E Zubakov, *Geroicheskii Leningrad* (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo Ministerstvo Oborony SSSR, 1972), p. 72. See also Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 423 and 460.

Zubakov's objections towards Salisbury's detailed depiction of siege life are somewhat ironic as they directly contradict the manner in which Leningraders sought to portray their experiences during the blockade itself. The most notable example of this desire to faithfully record history as it unfolded is found in the poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts. Her wartime writings comprise of simple observations and records of daily experiences. Seen as a whole, her output during the blockade is more akin to a diary than a conventional collection of poems. Though poems such as *Stikhi o Leningradskikh Bol'shevikakh* and *Gvardeitsy* are characterised by fervent declarations of Soviet patriotism they are far outnumbered by poems which seek to foreground the daily concerns of Leningraders¹⁵.

The *blokadnik* Ol'ga Rozanova who was interviewed for this project spoke of Ol'ga Berggol'ts' 'wonderful February Diary' as a work which had touched her profoundly¹⁶. Berggol'ts defied later Soviet mythocracy with the lines:

'I never became a hero,
I never thirsted after praise, or decorations,
My breath conjoins with the breath of Leningrad,
I was not being heroic, I was simply continuing to live'¹⁷.

These sentiments echo blockade veteran Aleksandra Arkhipova's assertion that the essence of siege life was expressed simply in a will to survive. While she discussed

¹⁵ See Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Stikhotvorenie-Govorit Leningrad-Vernost'*, *Tom Vtoroi* (Leningrad: *Khudozhestvennaia Literatura*, 1973), pp. 14 and 44.

¹⁶ Interview with Ol'ga Rozanova, BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹⁷ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Stikhotvorenie*...p. 56.

her ideological beliefs at length she returned again and again to the words, '*Nado Vyzhit*' ('You had to live through it - to *survive*')¹⁸.

Arkhipova and Rozanova reflected the views of the other *blokadniki* interviewed for this study by stressing the importance of the role Berggol'ts played both as a poet and broadcaster. Berggol'ts herself expressed the feeling that Leningraders were listening to her recitations differently by stating that 'People listened to poetry as they had never listened to it before, - with a sincere faith, in the darkness of cavernous apartments and pinned against muffled loudspeakers'¹⁹.

Vera Inber's book entitled *Pochti Tri Goda: Leningradskii Dnevnik* (*Almost Three Years: Leningrad Diary*) also eschews jingoistic patriotism in preference for simple observations. On 2 January 1942 during the bleakest period of the siege she wrote, 'In the cemeteries they are excavating long trenches, into which they toss the bodies. Individual graves will only be dug by the watchman if he is paid in bread'. Later that month she came near to despair exclaiming that 'The situation is catastrophic...There is no water. If the bread factory stops working tomorrow – even for one day what will happen?'²⁰

These sentiments mirrored the concerns of the populace itself and focused upon local activities as opposed to charting the overall progress of the war effort. It also became clear during the interviews that this group of survivors appreciated

¹⁸ Interview with Aleksandra Arkhipova, Edinburgh, April 2003, tape reference, BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, 1-32, transcript, p. 7.

¹⁹ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Stikhotvorenie*...p. 69.

²⁰ Vera Inber, *Pochti Tri Goda: Leningradskii Dnevnik* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1968), pp. 47 and 66.

the fact that so many of Leningrad's artists, poets and musicians shared the experience of the blockade alongside them. In contrast, Anna Akhmatova, Leningrad's most celebrated poet of the 20th century was virtually never mentioned. Orlando Figes asserts that her wartime odes *Kliatva (Oath)* and *Muzhestvo (Courage)* 'gave courage to the millions of soldiers who went into battle'²¹. Yet, as Aleksandra Arkhipova stated she was evacuated to Tashkent during the first months of the siege²². She went on to state that Akhmatova's poetry was less relevant for her during the siege because it was 'not so appropriate for those times'²³.

Nikolai Tikhonov fuses these two distinct strands of siege discourse together in his book: *The Defence of Leningrad: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Siege* which was translated into English and published in 1943 before the siege had been lifted. Tikhonov's account begins with an impassioned deconstruction of the Nazi hierarchy whose thirst for destruction is contrasted by Leningrad's 'steadfast human collective'²⁴. Even at this early stage, while the drama itself was still unfolding Tikhonov reveals the sacral undertones of siege narrative. He quotes the Leningrader L. Nikolskii's pledge to 'fulfill our sacred duty as Soviet patriots'²⁵.

²¹ Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002), p. 490. See also *The Complete Poems of Anna Akhmatova*, editor R. Reeder, trans. J. Hemschemeyer (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 428 and Dmitrii Khrenkov, *Anna Akhmatova v Peterburge-Petrograde-Leningrade* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1989), p. 132.

²² Akhmatova was evacuated at the end of September 1941, first to Moscow and subsequently to Tashkent. Dmitrii Khrenkov, *Anna Akhmatova*, p. 135.

²³ Arkhipova, transcript, p. 9.

²⁴⁻²⁵ Nikolai Tikhonov, *The Defence of Leningrad: Eye-Witness Accounts of the Siege* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1943), pp. 6 and 24.

Dmitrii V. Pavlov's *Leningrad 1941: The Blockade* which was published during the period of Khriushchev's thaw in the 1960's presents a startling critique of the Stalinist cult and the postwar clampdown which resulted in the premature closure of the Museum of the Defence of Leningrad. He brands this act 'unjust' and regarded it as part of a wider cult of personality which recorded the heroic deeds of selected individuals. In contrast, he viewed the museum as reflecting the efforts of the entire populace thereby keeping 'sacred' the memory of Leningrad's defenders. Yet, despite its reopening in 1957 Pavlov remained highly critical of notable omissions in the exhibition which he described as 'annoying'. He was particularly disturbed by the exhibition's tendency to overlook the fact that there had been a mass famine during the blockade²⁶.

Kirschenbaum also notes this tendency to commemorate places and objects rather than human suffering. She observes that while various plaques mark shell damage on the Anichkov bridge, St. Isaac's Cathedral and the Church of the Saviour on the Blood there is a lack of memorials marking 'civilian deaths due to starvation'²⁷. Nevertheless, Kirschenbaum notes the continued existence of an 'unmarked museum of the blockade' which endures in the memories of survivors themselves²⁸. It is also important not to overestimate the reach of Soviet mythocracy into personal recollections. While Ol'ga Rozanova recognised that topics such as cannibalism

²⁶ Dmitrii V. Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941: The Blockade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 166-67.

²⁷⁻²⁸ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* pp. 189 and 150.

had been censored during the Soviet era she viewed her own testimony as supplementing siege historiography rather than as an outright rejection of official accounts²⁹. Members of veterans' clubs who were interviewed were accustomed to openly sharing their recollections within a defined community of fellow survivors. They also delivered their testimonies with high confidence and evident pride.

Therefore, the relationship between Soviet mythocracy and eye-witness accounts is not one of straightforward confrontation but is more subtle. The epic Soviet narrative of 'heroism and meaningful sacrifice' continues to reaffirm to veterans the importance of their wartime activities. It also creates 'shared narratives that give form and meaning to the recall of past experience'³⁰.

As an example of this 'unmarked museum of the blockade' Kirschenbaum cites the experience of siege veteran Daniil Granin. In the winter of 1947 Granin was a member of a crew sent out to repair an underground power cable near Suvorovskii Prospekt. It became evident that the fault was 'a consequence of wartime damage in the area'. Yet none of the repair crew could remember being called out to this section of Ligovskaia Street before.

²⁹ Ol'ga Rozanova, transcript, p. 7.

³⁰ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 7.

Suddenly ‘the cold and gloom and the creaking snow’ triggered Granin’s memory. He pieced together recollections of a day on leave in December 1941. Finally, he was able to inform the foreman that ‘A bomb fell here. It was toward the end of December’. Kirschenbaum notes that his memories recalled ‘a web of radio broadcasts, chance encounters, and apartments of dead friends’³¹. They were also an example of how the ‘*restored* city was not always a forgetful city’. This story demonstrates ‘the intricate links between the public and the private city’³². Thus, survivors in Kirschenbaum’s view retained the ability to ‘see the prewar and wartime city as they walked postwar streets’³³.

Granin, along with his co-author Ales’ Adamovich subsequently wrote *Blokadnaia Kniga* or *The Book of the Blockade*. Published in 1979 it is described by Kirschenbaum as marking a turning point in public debate about the siege³⁴. Granin and Adamovich present the testimonies of around 150 *blokadniki* which focus almost entirely on the myths of everyday siege life. In calling our attention to the everyday activities of Leningraders during the blockade Granin is also reminding his readers of the ‘unfulfilled promises of the ‘people’s war’³⁵.

His efforts to foreground the heroism of ordinary citizens though continues to come under attack from retired Communist officials. Grigorii Romanov, the

³¹⁻³² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...p. 148.

³³⁻³⁴ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 149 and 181.

³⁵ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...p. 185.

arch conservative former secretary of the party's regional committee (*Obkom*) dismissed *Blokadnaia Kniga* as 'unreliable'. He stated that, 'I survived a lot during those days – dystrophy, personal injury, contusion and hospital'. He goes on to state that, 'You know I take a dim view of Granin, precisely because of what he says and writes about the blockade. It is absolutely incorrect and subjective'.

Romanov asserts that Granin downplays the fact that Leningraders had to defend their city at all costs. 'What he does not speak about' is the reality that if 'we had surrendered the city, there would have been nothing left'³⁶. Romanov comes close to equating Granin's accounts of cannibalism and postwar political repressions in Leningrad with treason. Consequently, there continues to be a debate amongst members of the elderly generation about how siege life should be presented.

Clearly, Romanov was threatened by Granin's revelations fearing that they would undermine the myth of war. Yet Kirschenbaum reminds us that darker revelations 'should not be taken as a universally recognized new, *true* picture of the blockade'³⁷. The inclusion of previously taboo details in memoirs does not necessarily 'imply a rejection of the Leningrad epic'³⁸.

³⁶ Elena Iakovleva, 'Ia Protiv Nedostovernnykh Versii', *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 27 January 2004 <www.rg.ru/2004/01/27/romanov.html> [accessed 04/06/2005]. In his introduction to *The 900 days* Salisbury delivers a passionate attack against Romanov whom he describes as hostile towards survivors. 'It was widely believed in Leningrad that Romanov hoped to remove from the city its very large number of invalids, disabled and prematurely retired citizens' p. ix.

³⁷⁻³⁸ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* pp. 234-35.

Unearthing, taboo stories has also brought with it counter narratives expressing a sense of ‘nostalgia for allegedly more idealistic times’³⁹. Correspondingly, revelations of cannibalism did not ultimately ‘reshape blockade narratives’ because survivors continued to explain their experiences in general with reference to ‘terms of steadfastness, patriotism, and *intelligentnost*’⁴⁰.

Kirschenbaum’s most important point regarding *Blokadnaia Kniga* and other frank siege recollections such as that of Lidiia Ginzberg’s *Zapiski Blokadnogo Cheloveka* is that their revelations do not preclude ‘redemptive, happy endings’⁴¹. She goes on to state that ‘The epic narrative and the zone of the unspeakable reinforced one another’⁴². Cannibalism was the ‘gruesome residue of heroism’ but it did not threaten the ‘sacred myth of the suffering and heroic city’⁴³.

Tales of cannibalism reinforced the fact that the vast majority of the populace resisted falling into a state of moral degradation. In this regard it could even embolden the sacred myth of heroic suffering because it underlined the fact that most Leningraders had ‘preserved the wholeness of the human personality to the last minute of their lives under conditions of incredible privation and acute hunger’⁴⁴.

³⁹⁻⁴⁰ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 236 and 246.

⁴¹⁻⁴² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 181 and 257.

⁴³ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 238 and 271.

⁴⁴ Dmitrii Pavlov, *Leningrad 1941*, p. 131.

The continued existence of this ‘unmarked museum of the blockade’ in the memories of survivors might also lead *blokadniki* to be somewhat confused by Salisbury’s statement that ‘The Leningrad epic was wiped out of public memory insofar as this was physically possible...’⁴⁵ Of course, he is referring here to public as opposed to private memory. Nevertheless, *blokadniki* often base their recollections on intense sensory experiences which do not fade through time⁴⁶. As one survivor recalled, ‘In my mind I know that when the war ended, my whole body, my whole organism I remember...you cannot translate this into words...that feeling of hunger and fear I will never forget through the years’⁴⁷. This issue is complicated by the fact that as cited above survivors refer to Soviet era slogans to illuminate aspects of their testimonies.

It is also the case that works like *Blokadnaia Kniga*, Pavlov’s *Leningrad v Blokade* and Pavel Luknitskii’s *Skvoz’ vsiu Blokadu* (A glimpse through the Blockade) demonstrate a surprising diversity of siege accounts during the Soviet era⁴⁸. Harrison Salisbury claimed in 1985 that since the original publication of his book: *The 900 days: The Siege of Leningrad* in 1969 no new revelations about the siege had been revealed. ‘Details have slipped out here and there,

⁴⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 581.

⁴⁶ Refer to ‘Oral History and the Veracity of Long-Term Memory’, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Testimony by Vera Odinet in Svetlana Aleksievich, *U voiny ne Zhenskoe Litso – Poslednie svideteli* (Moskva: Sovetskii Pisatel’ 1988), p. 219.

⁴⁸ Similar to Vera Inber’s *Pochti Tri Goda* Luknitskii’s book charts daily concerns and activities. His entry for 29 December 1941 reads, ‘Death from starvation – it is everywhere, in all its forms...’ p. 161. Pavel Luknitskii, *Skvoz’ vsiu Blokadu* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988).

but nothing of even secondary consequence'. He goes on to state that 'The story as told here is complete'⁴⁹. The intervening period had seen the publication not only of *Blokadnaia Kniga* but of A. Rubashkin's *Golos Leningrada* and V. A. Kobalev and A. I Pavlovskii's *Literaturnyi Leningrad 'V Dni blokady'*⁵⁰. These consisted of detailed studies of personal testimonies, the role of the radio in besieged Leningrad and an extensive examination of literature and poetry written during the blockade. Consequently, Salisbury's dismissal of Soviet historiography demonstrates a refusal to acknowledge important Russian publications which were produced despite the straightjacket imposed by Soviet mythocracy.

Within the Soviet context, attempts by former Communist dignitaries such as Grigorii Romanov to maintain control over siege scholarship were unnecessary. In Kirschenbaum's view heroic narratives along with Berggol'ts' words, 'No one is forgotten, and nothing is forgotten' are examples of 'the consoling power of myth'⁵¹. To a certain extent the debate about whether graphic depictions of siege life de-mythologise the overall story of the blockade is irrelevant. This is demonstrated by the subtle relationship between private and public memory outlined above.

⁴⁹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* Introduction, p. ix.

⁵⁰ V. A. Kobalev and A. I Pavlovskii: *Literaturnyi Leningrad 'V Dni Blokady'* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo <Nauka> Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1973). A. Rubashkin, *Golos Leningrada: Leningrad Radio v Dni Blokady* (Leningrad: <Iskusstvo> Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1980).

⁵¹ Berggol'ts lines are engraved upon the memorial at the Piskarevskii cemetery. Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* pp. 205-6.

It is the premise of this thesis that tales of heroism and cannibalism intertwine in survivors' memories because they express the ambivalence of the sacred which lies at the heart of siege discourse. As stated in the chapter examining myth theory Mircea Eliade observed that the sacred 'is at once sacred and defiled...The sacred presents the universe as a *mysterium tremendum*, dreadful and ambiguous' and evokes both 'horror and reverence'⁵².

In this regard, the true sacrality of the siege story cannot be revealed without accompanying tales of profane acts. During the winter of 1941 Leningraders faced the possibility each day of becoming *homines sacri* by confronting death⁵³.

The most resilient of siege myths centres around perceptions that the united wartime community came together to thwart that threat. Alexander Werth visited Leningrad in 1943 before the siege was finally lifted. He observed that 'The people of Leningrad have become like a large family, united by common hardships and their common effort'. The fact that this sense of community prevailed under such trying conditions has made this myth even more resilient in blockade testimonies.

⁵² Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 15. See also Mark Mathuray, 'Realizing the Sacred: Power and Meaning in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God', *Research in African Literatures*, 34.3 (Autumn 2003), 46-65 (p. 48).

⁵³ A condensed outline of the thesis is presented in James Clapperton, 'The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative: Conversations with Survivors', *The Journal of the Oral History Society*, 35.1 (Spring 2007), 49-60.

The maintenance of discipline and order emphasised by respondents such as Ol'ga Rozanova, Aleksandra Arkhipova and others would also be less remarkable without accompanying depictions of the daily horrors which Leningraders were faced with. This was expressed succinctly by Vera Inber who was reluctant to venture out of her back door for fear of the sights that lay beyond. She stated that 'It is frightening to go out of our back gate in the morning. Every day there are eight to ten bodies... They just lie there in the snow',⁵⁴.

Werth quotes the story of Major Lozak who was haunted by the memory of seeing a passing pedestrian's head sheared off by a shell. The person continued to walk a few steps and then collapsed. He then watched as ambulance services frantically cleared up the blood. They were instructed to carry out this task as quickly as possible following air raids as the sight of blood could potentially damage the morale of other citizens⁵⁵.

Perhaps Soviet mythocracy sought also to clear away the blood contained within *blokadnikis'* tales in order to sanitise the epic Leningrad story. Yet, this does not appear to concern the respondents who took part in this study. They seem to regard their own stories and personal losses as intersecting

⁵⁴ Vera Inber, *Pochti Tri Goda...*p. 45.

⁵⁵ Alexander Werth, *Leningrad*, pp. 80-81.

with official narratives. The Soviet myth of heroism and defiance will also endure because it continues to 'affirm the historical importance of personal, intimate stories of suffering and death'⁵⁶.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE FIRST DAY OF WAR

John Erickson states that during the final days before Hitler unleashed Operation Barbarossa upon the Soviet Union the atmosphere was remarkably relaxed in Leningrad. Andrei Zhdanov, the secretary of the regional party committee had just left for the Black Sea resort of Sochi on 19 June and clearly did not regard the German attack as imminent⁵⁷.

Bruce W. Lincoln described Sunday 22 June 1941 as the first warm day after a period of damp breezy weather. 'That evening, crowds celebrating summer solstice and the end of classes at the university had flowed across the Neva's bridges and filled Nevskii Prospekt. Leningraders also headed out of town to Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk to picnic in the parks surrounding the imperial palaces'⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 233.

⁵⁷ John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1975), p. 102.

⁵⁸ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight: St. Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia*, p. 268.

Solomon Volkov quotes the sentiments of Ol'ga Freidenberg, Pasternak's cousin who recalled that 'It was terribly unexpected, almost unreal, even though it had been predicted with certainty'. The composer Dmitrii Shostakovitch was judging final examinations at the Leningrad Conservatory that day. He had planned to attend two football matches later in the afternoon and despite the cancellation of the games kept the unused tickets as a memento⁵⁹.

Anna Akhmatova's long term companion Nikolai Punin recalled her rushing into his room with 'dishevelled graying hair in her black silk Chinese robe to report Molotov's speech on the radio⁶⁰. Lidiia Ginzberg stated that Leningraders thirsted for information. 'Five times a day people would give up what they were doing and run towards the loudspeakers in the street... They wanted to know what was happening, and if it was war, what was going to happen'⁶¹.

Ol'ga Berggol'ts, like Akhmatova had suffered greatly during the 1930's. Two years earlier she had emerged from a Soviet labour camp and the outbreak of war arose mixed feelings within her. Salisbury quotes the lines she composed on hearing of the outbreak of war⁶²:

⁵⁹ Solomon Volkov, *Shostakovitch and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), p. 203.

⁶⁰ Elaine Feinstein, *Anna of all the Russias: The Life of Anna Akhmatova* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p. 188.

⁶¹ Lidiia Ginzberg, *Zapisnye Knizhki Vospominania Esse, Zapiski Blokadnogo Cheloveka* (Sankt Peterburg: *Iskusstvo*, 2002), p. 612.

⁶² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*p. 121.

*'The bitter years of oppression and of evil.
But in a blinding flash I understood:
It was not I but you who suffered and waited.
No, I have forgotten nothing,
But even the dead and the victims
Will rise from the grave at your call';*

(from Uzel, Moscow-Leningrad, 1965)

Clearly, the dead and the victims of Russia could have been either those who were to die under Fascist occupation or those who had perished during Stalin's purges.

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN

Elaine Feinstein writes that within a week 'the full scale of the catastrophe was apparent. The Germans had penetrated 300 miles into Soviet territory and encircled 400,000 men. Minsk...was in their hands. The road to Smolensk was open and the Germans were advancing on all fronts. Within three weeks of the start of the war, Russia had lost two million men and 3,500 tanks'⁶³.

The respondent Sergei Goncharenko was on duty on his ship off the coast of Libau on 22 June. That night his ship was attacked and he and other surviving crew members were subsequently rescued by a passing Soviet vessel⁶⁴.

Harrison Salisbury states that Libau or Liepaja fell into Soviet hands following

⁶³ Elaine Feinstein, *Anna of all the Russias*, p. 188.

⁶⁴ Interviews with *Sergei and Tat'iana Goncharenko*, St. Petersburg, July 2003, BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, 1-33, transcript, p. 8.

the annexation of the Baltic states in July 1940. 'Neither the Baltic commander, Admiral Tributs, nor his superior, Admiral Kuznetsov, had much taste for Libau. It was an open harbor only a few minutes' flight from the German air bases in East Prussia, and the naval commanders did not regard it as suitable for wartime use',⁶⁵.

Lincoln estimates that the prewar population of Leningrad stood at 3,544,000. By September over 200,000 Leningraders had signed up for active service. As these conscripts were male it meant that the preparation of the city's defences was largely carried out by women and teenagers⁶⁶. Evan Mawdsley provides a lower estimate for the prewar population of Leningrad which he puts at 3,100,000. 2,500,000 remained in the city as late as December 1941 and after both military conscription and famine had decimated the male population Leningrad became a city which was 75% female by the spring of 1942. Mawdsley calculates that in April 1942 'some 181,000 industrial workers were women out of a total of 254,000'⁶⁷.

Of course, Soviet historiography tends not to focus on the catastrophic opening weeks of the war and even less so on the reasons behind it. Albert Axel interviewed several of Stalin's commanders in 1987 and still found them to be unrepentant. Admiral Gorshkov maintained that 'The maximum was done to build up our armed forces'. General Pavlovskii asserted that 'our entire industry worked round the

⁶⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 31.

⁶⁶ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight*...p. 272.

⁶⁷ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941-45* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 142.

clock'. They still repeated Stalin's mantra that mobilisation, if premature could have potentially triggered an earlier German attack⁶⁸.

Mawdsley writes that the German forces in the north (Army Group Nord) were under the command of field Marshal Ritter von Leeb while his opposite number was General Fedor Kuznetsov. As Soviet forces made a hasty retreat across Estonia Kuznetsov's position became untenable and he was swiftly replaced by General Sobennikov. The Northwestern theatre as a whole was placed under the command of politburo member and civil war veteran Kliment Voroshilov. Leningrad was also under threat from Finnish forces stationed on the Karelian Isthmus⁶⁹.

At this point the Red Army formed a defensive line along the Luga river. This followed the final evacuation of Tallinn which Mawdsley describes as 'perhaps the worst disaster in Russian naval history...'⁷⁰ Two German panzer and two motorized divisions then began to advance along southern approaches towards Leningrad. Back in Germany Hitler laid out his plans to annihilate what he described as the 'venomous nest' of Leningrad⁷¹.

By mid-August the Germans broke through the Luga line situated seventy miles to the south of Leningrad. The city government then mobilised the People's Militia

⁶⁸ Albert Axell, *Stalin's War: Through the Eyes of his Commanders*, (London: Arms and Armour, 1997), pp. 121-25.

⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰ Evan Mawdsley: *Thunder in the East*...pp. 81-82 and p. 83.

⁷¹ Evan Mawdsley: *Thunder in the East*...pp. 83-85.

comprising of some 135,000 personnel as a response to the approaching crisis.

By the end of August the German advance had cut the main railway links to the southeast and east by taking the small town of Mga. Finally, after seizing the fortress town of Shliussel'burg the Germans closed the circle around Leningrad⁷².

On 4 September the Germans began to bombard the city from the south. With the fall of Shliussel'burg came the end of Voroshilov's reign and he was promptly replaced by Marshal Zhukov. Voroshilov's contribution was summed up by Aleksandra Arkhipova with the following words, 'Well, at the beginning they sent Voroshilov here, and Voroshilov screwed everything up, he was old, you see, knew only about how to shoot a rifle, but that was about it'⁷³. Marshal von Leeb's forces now stopped just south of the outskirts of Leningrad where they would doggedly remain for around 900 days.

The first breakthrough for the Soviet forces came when they recaptured the town of Tikhvin in December 1941 and were able to drive German forces back from their most advanced positions. Nevertheless, the German forces maintained a stranglehold over the 'Shliussel'burg corridor' making the evacuation and feeding of civilians extremely difficult⁷⁴.

In mid-December Stavka ordered an offensive to relieve Leningrad by focusing on an attempt to reestablish the main rail link to Moscow. The Volkhov Army Group under the command of General Meretskov began an offensive in early January 1942

⁷² Evan Mawdsley: *Thunder in the East*...pp. 83-85.

⁷³ Aleksandra Arkhipova, transcript, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Evan Mawdsley: *Thunder in the East*...pp. 129-30.

which was focused upon the capture of the station at Liuban'. Tragically, by April 1942 this campaign had cost 95,000 Russian lives and little real progress had been made. In the end Mawdsley cites lack of communication between Meretskov, General Khozin's Leningrad Army Group and the 2nd Shock Army as the reason behind the failure to break through the German lines. This was followed by the crushing of the 2nd Shock army in late June 1942⁷⁵.

David M. Glantz adduces a further reason for the failure of these initial campaigns, 'Staff organization was poor, troop experience minimal, and virtually all offensives were hastily planned'⁷⁶. He also stated that during the first year of the war the Soviets were less adept at concealing troop movements from the German command. Glantz states that military advances progressed hand in hand with a gradual mastery of the practice of *maskirovka* which consisted of various decoy tactics aimed at confusing the enemy⁷⁷.

Mawdsley underlines the proximity of German forces ensconced upon the Pulkovo heights to the south of Leningrad. A mere 20-25,000 yards separated Leningraders from enemy lines. Nevertheless, the Germans remained too far south of Leningrad to be able to hit the city with their medium-range artillery. Correspondingly, from December 1941 they concentrated on launching incendiary bombs or *zazhigalki* which were most lethal for civilians but less damaging for the city's architecture.

⁷⁵ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*...pp. 133.

⁷⁶⁻⁷⁷ David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), pp. 71 and 103.

By late November 1941 lorries began to ferry the first supplies across the frozen lake Ladoga, a transport route subsequently immortalised as the *road of life* or *doroga zhizni*.

The northern theatre remained a major battlefield during 1942 and early 1943. By the beginning of 1943 victory at Stalingrad and other Soviet advances made it possible to mount Operation Spark which reestablished a road link between greater Russia and the city. From September 1942 Hitler planned to strike back by launching Operation *Nordlicht*. Nevertheless, these plans were preempted by Russian advances towards the village of Siniavino. Despite heavy losses Russian forces established a bridgehead at *Moskovskaia Dubrovka* ⁷⁸.

It was the launching of a third major Soviet offensive as part of Operation Spark which was to lead to a final breakthrough. A route was forced through across the southern side of lake Ladoga, this time with comparatively small Russian casualties of around 34,000 personnel. Yet, for a further ten months the northern theatre remained the site of trench warfare reminiscent of World War One⁷⁹. Finally, on the night of 14 January 1944 Soviet forces launched an artillery barrage consisting of 220,000 shells⁸⁰. Salisbury states that 'In the first day the Russians drove a wedge from one to nearly three miles deep into the Nazi lines on a three mile front'. By

⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*...pp. 178 and 180.

⁸⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 564.

22 January the German forces were in disarray. 'Soviet troops were said to be having difficulty keeping up with them'⁸¹. The siege had finally been lifted.

Russian commanders had also mastered the tactic of *maskirovka* by ferrying in 44,000 Soviet troops to the area around the town of Oranienbaum without attracting the attention of the enemy. The Russian 67th army then drove the German forces across some 50 miles until they reached the Luga river by the end of January 1944 and by mid-February they were on the brink of crossing the Estonian border⁸².

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE CITY

Harrison Salisbury wrote that the opening of the war was beset by tragedy for Leningraders. Thousands of children were evacuated to Luga, Tolmachevo and Gachina which were to fall 'directly in the path of German advance... Within a few weeks thousands of these children (and many of their parents) would be lost in the advance of the German tanks'. Trains carrying children were bombed at Edrovo and Luchkovo with heavy casualties. 'The Leningrad authorities had decided at the end of June to remove 392,000 children from the city'. Salisbury states that by the end of the first week of July 162,349 had already been evacuated although he adds that estimates vary⁸³.

⁸¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 143.

⁸² Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*...pp. 288-89.

⁸³ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 143.

Interestingly, Evan Mawdsley does not indict the Soviet authorities for failing to evacuate enough civilians during the Summer and Autumn of 1941 and emphasises the fact that many Leningraders chose to remain in the city. Nevertheless, once it became the official policy of the city government in December 1941 the evacuation of the civilian populace soon gathered momentum and by mid-March some 554,000 people had been rescued⁸⁴.

In response to the initial crisis Andrei Zhdanov had formed the Leningrad Defense Committee consisting of the 'big five'. These were party secretaries Kuznetsov, Shtykov, chairman N.V Solovov of the regional Soviet and mayor P.S Popkov of the city Soviet⁸⁵. The city population was then called up for fortifications work. Anyone without other employment was required to fulfil eight hours of work a day, digging trenches and constructing shelters⁸⁶.

Salisbury states that there was a collapse in crime during the initial weeks of the war. 'Robberies were down 95.6 percent and drunkenness 78 percent'⁸⁷. At the same time a wave of paranoia swept through the city as rumours of foreign spies abounded. Security patrols, often consisting of teenagers walked the streets in an effort to apprehend suspicious looking individuals.

Rationing was first introduced on 18 July and was set at 800 grams of bread a day for workers, 600 for employees and 400 for dependants and children⁸⁸. Nevertheless,

⁸⁴ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*...p. 135.

⁸⁵⁻⁸⁶ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 146-48.

⁸⁷ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 170.

⁸⁸ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 203.

cereals, fats and sugar were still widely available and commercial stores remained open. The first air raid commenced on 6 September but this was relatively light. Then, on the night of 8 September the Germans launched 6,327 incendiary bombs which set off a total of 178 fires. For the next few days the 'smell of burning meat, the acrid stench of carbonized sugar, the heavy scent of burning oil and flour filled the air'⁸⁹.

On 2 September daily rations were cut to 600 grams a day for workers, 400 grams for office workers and 300 grams for dependants and children under twelve. Leningrad was already facing a crisis with only several weeks of supplies remaining within the city. A further reduction was introduced nine days later when the daily ration was lowered to 500 grams per day for workers, 300 for office employees, 250 for dependants and 300 for children under twelve⁹⁰.

From mid-October the authorities had begun researching the possibility of finding various food substitutes. 'A scientific team headed by V.I Sharkov of the Woods Products Institute, worked out a formula for edible wood cellulose made from pine sawdust'⁹¹. By the middle of November this was added to the recipe for baking bread. Through treatment at high temperatures cottonseed cake became edible and was also added to bread⁹².

⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 293-94.

⁹¹⁻⁹² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 369-70.

The first snowfall began on 14 October and it had reached a depth of four inches by the end of the month⁹³. These early snowfalls were a portent of the winter to come and Leningraders were already digging out old *burzhuiki*, small stoves which had kept them warm during previous crises. At the same time they were enduring the heaviest shelling of the siege. Salisbury states that these first months witnessed 79 % of the total number of air raids and 88 % of air-raid casualties⁹⁴. Mawdsley estimates that just under 16,000 Leningraders were killed by falling incendiaries⁹⁵.

The authorities now looked desperately to establish a transport route out of Leningrad and resolved to construct an ice road across lake Ladoga. As they waited for the lake to freeze rations were cut further to 300 grams for workers and 150 grams for everyone else on 13 November. A week later they were reduced a final time to 250 grams for workers and 125 grams for the rest of the populace⁹⁶. The latter amount, or *sto dvadtsat' piat'* in Russian is repeatedly referred to by *blokadniki* as representing the descent into starvation endured by the populace⁹⁷.

The city gradually ground to a halt and by mid-December trams had ceased to operate. 'From now on Leningrad would walk with weak and tired feet on icy, drifted streets'. Yet work was proceeding apace on the lake Ladoga thoroughfare where 19,000

⁹³⁻⁹⁴ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 371-72.

⁹⁵ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East*...p. 134.

⁹⁶ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 387-89.

⁹⁷ See also 'A Topography of the Uncanny: Walking through Besieged Leningrad', p. 9.

personnel had been stationed. Already 'first -aid stations, traffic-control points, repair depots, snow-clearing detachments' and 'bridge-layers' had all been put in place⁹⁸. At this crucial juncture Zhdanov decided to gamble on raising food rations a 100 grams for workers and 75 grams for everyone else. The gamble paid off and at the same time boosted morale⁹⁹.

Despite Zhdanov's action the situation remained critical during early January when the city possessed only two days worth of flour stocks. In addition the ice road was not functioning as expected. This was the result of 'the impact of heavy traffic, lack of fuel' and the illness and death of workers from cold and starvation¹⁰⁰. Fuel stocks were perilously low and Zhdanov was forced to authorise the demolition of all wooden structures¹⁰¹.

Salisbury states that the exact figures for deaths during these months are hard to ascertain but that in January around 3,500 to 4,000 people died every day. During that month the death rate of males from starvation related diseases was staggeringly high at 85 percent. The ratio of 'disease and death statistics have no parallel in modern history'¹⁰². Nevertheless, a crucial development took place on 18 January 1942 when for the first time since the beginning of the siege the ice road teams exceeded their quota. This led to a rise in daily rations within a week to 400 grams for workers, 300 for ordinary employees and 250 for dependants and children. On

⁹⁸⁻⁹⁹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 414 -16.

¹⁰⁰⁻⁰¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 414 -16.

¹⁰² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 420 and 456.

11 February a further rise was introduced bringing the daily amount to 500 grams for workers, 400 for employees and 300 for everyone else¹⁰³.

Zhdanov and the State Defence Committee now prepared to evacuate 500,000 people from the city. Intense shelling on the lake and the frail condition of many evacuees resulted in a heavy toll of casualties. Nevertheless, by the end of the month over 100,000 people had been transported across to mainland Russia¹⁰⁴.

As stated above the winter began earlier than usual and temperatures were to plummet to below -30 making it the coldest winter in living memory. Nadezhda Cherepenina states that the coldest days were on 24 and 25 of January 1942 when the temperature reached -34 C. On these days the daily death toll was over 5,000¹⁰⁵. Cherepenina also notes that during starvation the body generates insufficient heat. Therefore, the sensation of cold was heightened. In January there were six days when a temperature of below -30 was registered. By the end of the month 95% of standpipes were frozen. In February the Registry Office reported 108,029 deaths, the highest of the entire siege¹⁰⁶.

During late 1941 childrens' sleds began to appear all over Leningrad as the dead were dragged to the cemeteries by friends and relatives. Many corpses were

¹⁰³⁻⁰⁴ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 492-494.

¹⁰⁵⁻⁰⁶ Nadezhda Cherepenina, 'Assessing the scale of Famine and Death in the Besieged City', in *Life And Death in Besieged Leningrad*, p. 31 and pp. 43-45.

abandoned on streets corners and subsequently disappeared into vast snowdrifts which enveloped the city. Rumours spread of cannibalism and this led in turn 'to the creation of a special group of detectives and psychiatrists in the Criminal Investigation Department of the NKVD board'¹⁰⁷.

Boris Belozerov states that almost 900 people were arrested for this crime from December 1941 to February 1942. Pilfering continued throughout the siege from food warehouses and was particularly common in February 1942 when 'each ration card holder being fed was cheated out of 295g of cereals, 2,475g of soya products, 3kg of vegetables and 150g of dried fruit'¹⁰⁸. Nevertheless, Belozerov states that the number of criminals (15,193 arrests and 2,093 executions between 1 July 1941 and 1 July 1943) was remarkably low¹⁰⁹.

By the early Spring as Salisbury notes the 'big task was to clean up the city. Unless the corpses, filth and debris could be removed, Leningrad would perish in the epidemics of Spring'¹¹⁰. The operation was launched on 8 March, International Women's Day. By 4 April some 318,000 people had taken part in this vast collective action. 'Everyone went into the streets - old women, men hardly able to hold a shovel, children'¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷⁻⁰⁸ Boris Belozerov, 'Crime during the Siege', in *Life And Death in Besieged Leningrad*, pp. 223-24.

¹⁰⁹ Boris Belozerov, 'Crime during the Siege', pp. 226-27.

¹¹⁰⁻¹¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 507-08.

During early 1942 Communist Youth brigades were sent out across the city to rescue starving individuals in countless apartment blocks. These service detachments were instructed to 'help the living, if possible, and to remove the dead'¹¹². Later they helped clear the backlog of undelivered letters and telegrams, though in some apartments no one was left alive to receive them. By 15 April, 116 trolley busses began to run again, a clear boost for general morale¹¹³.

On 23 April 1942 the *road of life* came to an end as the ice became too brittle due to the spring thaw¹¹⁴. Salisbury estimates that 800,000 Leningraders are buried in mass graves at the Piskarevskii Cemetery and that a further 300,000 are interned in the Serafimov cemetery¹¹⁵. The huge majority of these mortalities occurred during that first winter.

Despite these appalling conditions cultural life continued. Broadcasters at Radio House weakened by dystrophy whispered the headlines under the light of a single kerosene lamp. When they were unable to speak their voices were replaced by the ticking of a metronome¹¹⁶. The most recognisable voice of all was that of the poetess Ol'ga Berggol'ts who recited newly composed works documenting the daily struggles of Leningraders.

Theatre productions continued at the *Teatr Muzikal'noi Komedii* and on 9 August 1942 the city's cultural luminaries attended the Leningrad premiere

¹¹²⁻¹³ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 507-08.

¹¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 488 and 510.

¹¹⁶ A. Rubashkin, *Golos Leningrada*, p. 50.

of Shostakovitch's 'Leningrad' symphony. Concerts had taken place even during the darkest period of the siege. The composer Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky recalled attending a concert at the Composers' Union on 20 November 1941. The hall was lit by candles and the audience sat huddled in overcoats, hats and winter boots¹¹⁷.

Following the recapture of the fortress town of Shliussel'berg in January 1943 rations were raised further to 700 grams for workers in heavy industry, 600 for other workers, 500 for employees and 400 for dependants and children¹¹⁸. Nevertheless, the Germans continued to shell Leningrad and could not be dislodged from their positions atop the Pulkovo heights. Certain locations in Leningrad became renowned as extremely dangerous. Salisbury states that the 'square in front of Finland Station' began to be called "the valley of death" while the Liteinyi Bridge was christened "the devil's bridge"¹¹⁹. Several respondents mentioned that they feared crossing Leningrad's bridges because of potential air raids¹²⁰.

The siege was finally lifted on 27 January 1944. The city administration announced that Nevskii Prospekt, which had been renamed 25 October Street following the revolution, would return to its original name¹²¹. This led to wider

¹¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...pp. 426-27 and p. 552.

¹¹⁹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 555.

¹²⁰ See also 'A Topography of the Uncanny...' (p. 30).

¹²¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 565.

expectations that the status of Leningrad would be elevated following the epic blockade. These hopes were quashed in the Summer of 1946 when Zhdanov lambasted the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko and branded Akhmatova's wartime poetry as depicting feelings of loneliness and despair which were alien to Soviet literature¹²².

In 1948 the political campaign broadened out enveloping many of Leningrad's popular wartime figures such as Party Secretary Kuznetsov and Mayor Popkov. Then, in 1949 'without notice or public announcement' the newly opened Museum of the Defence of Leningrad was closed and its director Major Rakov arrested. It was only in 1957 during the period of Khriushchev's thaw that the museum was reopened¹²³.

In the memory of survivors there are a series of iconic words and images which have come to represent siege life. Among these are the words *sto dvadtsat' piat'* mentioned above and the small stove called the *burzhuika*. Nevertheless, the most emotive icon of all comes in the form of a short diary by eleven year old Tania Savicheva who lived at House No.13, Second Line, Vasilevskii Island and who died later in a children's home during the summer of 1943. Tania wrote:

¹²² *The Central Committee Resolution and Zhdanov's Speech on the Journals Zvezda and Leningrad*, transl. Felicity Ashbee and Irina Tidmarsh (Michigan, Royal Oak: Strathcona Publishing Co., 1978), p. 55.

¹²³ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* pp. 579-80.

'Z - Zhenia died 28 December, 12:30 in the morning, 1941.
 B - Babushka died 25 January, 3 o'clock, 1942.
 L - Leka died 17 March, 5 o'clock in the morning, 1942.
 D - Dedyas Vasias died 13 April, 2 o'clock at night, 1942.
 D - Dedyas Leshas, 10 May, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, 1942.
 M - Mama, 13 May, 7.30 A.M., 1942.
 S - Savichevs died. All died. Only Tania remains'¹²⁴.

With these simple words Savicheva encapsulated the essence of the tragedy which descended upon Leningrad during that first winter of 1941-42.

REMEMBERING THE BLOCKADE: SIEGE HISTORIOGRAPHY ACROSS THE DECADES

It is clear that the blockade's most celebrated poets Vera Inber and Ol'ga Berggol'ts made a determined decision to faithfully record events unfolding around them. Though their poetry is overtly patriotic at times it is an expression of local attachments. Stalin's name is almost completely absent from their wartime chronicles and the role of the politburo receives scant attention. Even in her odes to Sevastopol' and Stalingrad Berggol'ts makes no mention of Stalin's name or of his leadership. She speaks informally, as if speaking to an intimate friend. 'We fall asleep thinking of you' she tells her compatriots in Stalingrad. Stalingrad and Leningrad are 'two brothers'¹²⁵. It is the voice of one city conversing with another.

¹²⁴ 'T' is for Tanya' in Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 484.

¹²⁵ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Stikhotvorenie... Sevastopoliu*, p. 72 and *Stalingradu*, p. 82.

Alexander Werth, who was the only English based correspondent to visit Leningrad during the siege observed this fervent local patriotism as well as a distinct point in the war when the emphasis of state propaganda began to shift. Werth stated that up until the battle of Stalingrad propaganda had focused upon exalting the Russian national character and cultural heritage. After Stalingrad 'the word *Soviet* came into its own again' and the concept of Stalin as a 'military genius' began to emerge¹²⁶. The local patriotism of Inber and Berggol'ts seemed increasingly at odds with this growing trend.

Werth, himself a native of Leningrad, regarded Leningraders' patriotism as having little if anything to do with any fondness for the Communist Party but stressed that it emanated from a genuine love of their city. Writing in 1944 he is already aware that Stalin was antagonistic towards Leningrad's burgeoning sense of independence. He maintained that Leningraders were more reluctant than other Russians to display pictures of Stalin in their homes and that the leadership must have been aware of this lukewarm attitude¹²⁷.

Werth also observed that Leningraders regarded their city as 'something unique'¹²⁸. Both Leon Goure and Alan Wykes, whose studies of the siege appeared in the 1960's agree with these assertions. Goure wrote that 'To

¹²⁶⁻²⁸ Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941-45* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1964), pp. 535 and 334.

many Leningraders, Moscow was a rival that had to some extent unfairly deprived their city of its glory and importance, but was itself only a crude, administrative town...¹²⁹

Lisa Kirschenbaum states that this debate resurfaced during 1991 when the city government first proposed reintroducing the city's former name. The debate appeared to be couched with repeated reference to sacral and religious terminology. According to Kirschenbaum 'Their high morals, their civic patriotism, their sacrifices, *blokadniki* argued, distinguished them from the postwar generation and entitled them to respect and protection'¹³⁰.

Kirschenbaum even states that changing the city's name was equated with blasphemy (*koshchunstvo*). Leningrad, not St. Petersburg had been purified through suffering, becoming thereby a 'sacred place'¹³¹. She quotes one *blokadnik* who maintained that the word 'Leningrader' was inherently magical. 'I know that many doors and hearts were pushed open in front of me only because I was a Leningrader'¹³². The name of Leningrad also 'sanctified Leningraders' suffering'¹³³. *Leningradskaiia Pravda* underlined

¹²⁹⁻³⁰ Alan Wykes stresses the importance of local patriotism. *The Siege of Leningrad: Epic of Survival* (London: Parnell's History of the Second World War, book no. 5, 1968), p. 150. Leon Goure, *The Siege of Leningrad* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1962).

¹³⁰⁻³¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 262 and 270.

¹³²⁻³³ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...pp. 271 and 273.

this sacral theme by running a full page poster of the Mother-Motherland memorial at the Piskarevsky cemetery during the lead up to the referendum¹³⁴.

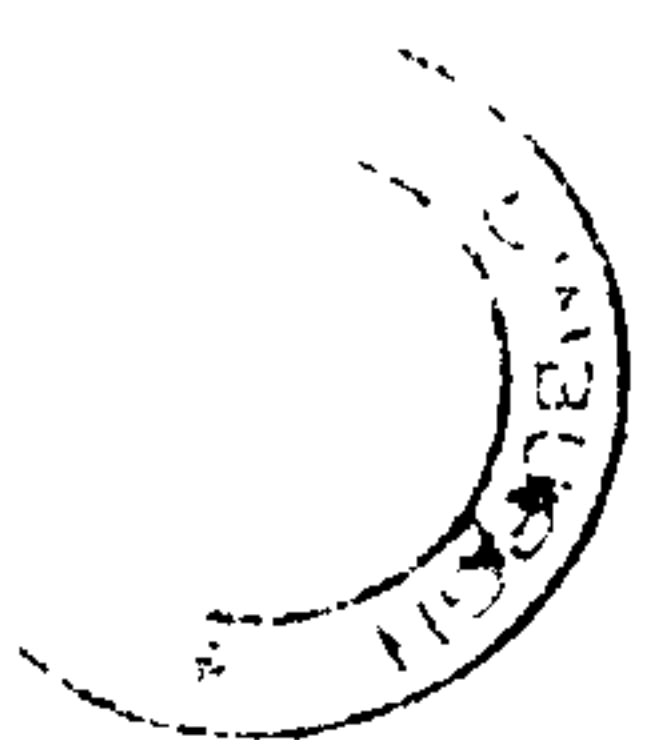
Leningraders' sense of identity and pride in their city was noted much earlier by K. Kripton who sought in his book *Osada Leningrada* to deconstruct the myth of Stalin's military genius. Kripton dismisses any assumptions that Moscow had a determining influence upon Leningrad's fate. He maintains that 'The population of Leningrad had more faith in justice and intelligence than the power of the Soviet government'¹³⁵. He also emphasises the fact that a number of Leningrad's churches reopened during the blockade and intimates that religious faith may have played a greater role in raising morale than the Communist authorities were willing to admit¹³⁶.

Kripton describes the bombing of the Badaev warehouses in September 1941 as a defining moment in blockade history. He was on duty digging defensive trenches at the time, and recalls glancing overhead at passing enemy aircraft. The bombing, in Kripton's view 'condemned the population to starvation rations'¹³⁷. Alan Wykes regarded the storing of food stocks in such closely knit

¹³⁴ *Leningradskaja Pravda*, 11 June 1991. Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...*p. 278.

¹³⁵⁻³⁶ K. Kripton, *Osada Leningrada* (New York: Izdatel'stvo, Chekhova, 1952), pp. 67 and 200.

¹³⁷ K. Kripton, *Osada Leningrada*, p. 144.



wooden warehouses as a product of 'maladministration' while Krypton regarded it as a catastrophic misjudgement¹³⁸.

Krypton states that Zhdanov and Voroshilov's assertions that the Badaev warehouses only contained limited supplies and that the famine was primarily a consequence of transportation problems only heightened suspicions that they were concealing the 'real truth'¹³⁹. He wondered why more Leningraders themselves did not ask whether 'saving the Badaev supplies could not have ensured the survival of the populace'¹⁴⁰.

Harrison Salisbury and Bruce Lincoln confirm that, in this instance it was in fact Zhdanov and Voroshilov who were correct¹⁴¹. Yet, Alexander Werth also acknowledges that the Badaev bombing had become a font of 'exaggerated stories'¹⁴². Kirschenbaum, who briefly mentions this story deemed it 'a useful and compelling turning point used by survivors as a means of explaining the reasons for the famine'¹⁴³.

¹³⁸ Alan Wykes, *The Siege of Leningrad*, p. 71 and Krypton, *Osada Leningrada*, p. 229.

¹³⁹⁻⁴⁰ Krypton, *Osada Leningrada*, pp. 233 and 231.

¹⁴¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 295. Salisbury states that 'Despite Pavlov's insistence that Badayev was not the key to Leningrad's future suffering Leningraders... remained convinced that the great fire had more to do with the city's suffering than the authorities have ever been willing acknowledge'. Dmitrii V. Pavlov was responsible for food supplies from September 1941 and is the author of *Leningrad 1941: The Blockade*, cited above. See also W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight...* p. 279.

¹⁴² Alexander Werth, *Russia at War: 1941-45*, p. 289.

¹⁴³ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 57.

The Badaev story confirms Kirschenbaum's wider observation that the siege was 'one of those events that are immediately invested with symbolic significance and treated, even as they are unfolding, as if they are being commemorated in advance'¹⁴⁴. As early as 10 September, less than forty eight hours after the bombing Vera Inber equated the loss of the Badaev warehouses as akin to losing 'the heart of the city's provisions'¹⁴⁵. The implication was that this event was to have dire consequences.

Harrison Salisbury, who also covers the rumours surrounding the Badaev bombing was fortunate in that he was able to conduct the bulk of his research during the brief political thaw which occurred during Khriushchev's premiership. His chapters on cannibalism and war profiteering revealed the darker aspects of siege life and subsequently led to the book's censorship during the Brezhnev era. Nevertheless, like Daniil Granin who collected similar gruesome accounts, Salisbury stresses the epic narrative of 'meaningful sacrifice' identified by Kirschenbaum. After the war, Leningraders according to Salisbury even regarded themselves as 'a special breed, a special people'¹⁴⁶.

Kirschenbaum perhaps places too much emphasis on Granin's struggle during the 1990's over whether to include additional chapters covering stories of

¹⁴⁴ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, 'Commemorations of the siege of Leningrad: a catastrophe in memory and myth', in *The Memory of Catastrophe*.

¹⁴⁵ Vera Inber, *Pochti Tri Goda...*p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*p. 557.

cannibalism. She states that Granin and Adamovich ‘allayed their own moral concerns about publishing stories of cannibalism in part by underscoring its relatively limited scope’¹⁴⁷. Cynthia Simmons states that *Blokadnaia Kniga* ‘falls within the valorous *canon* of Siege history, a work of the *thaw* variety, but restricted by the political considerations of its day and by the (perhaps resultant) editorial decisions of Adamovich and Granin’¹⁴⁸. This seems a little unjust when one considers Granin’s statement in the 2003 edition of his book in which he expresses intense frustration with earlier intrusions made by Soviet censors¹⁴⁹. Crime figures recently released documenting instances of cannibalism also back up Granin’s assertions that these activities were conducted within a fairly limited scope¹⁵⁰.

Perhaps Kirschenbaum’s most contentious claim is that from 1991 onwards ‘It became possible, for example, for survivors to condemn Stalin’s refusal to declare Leningrad an open city’¹⁵¹. She observes that remarkably few have done so. Kirschenbaum returns to this topic later in the book by quoting Gennadii Sobolev’s question: ‘Why didn’t Leningrad declare itself an open city, like Paris and other European capitals conquered by Hitler?’¹⁵² In this instance,

¹⁴⁷ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...p. 239.

¹⁴⁸ Cynthia Simmons, ‘Lifting the Siege: Women’s Voices on Leningrad (1941-1944)’, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 1-2 (1998): 43-65, p. 46.

¹⁴⁹ Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 488. Granin states that while the censors may wish that people would ‘close their eyes’ to instances of cannibalism Leningraders did not have this choice at the time (*Glavy, Kotorykh ne Bylo*).

¹⁵⁰ See above, top of p. 31.

¹⁵¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...p. 4.

¹⁵² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad*...p. 251. She is citing Gennadii Sobolev, ‘Eto gor’koe slovo “blokada”’, *Sankt-Peterburgskaia Panorama*, 1993, no. 8:3.

she does not provide her own conclusions and omits reference to historical data which repeatedly demonstrates that German intentions were to level the city.

In 1944 Alexander Werth documented Nazi atrocities committed in the occupied districts to the south of Leningrad. 'The town of Peterhof had disappeared with the exception of a shattered church and a few other buildings'. In the surrounding villages 'there wasn't a soul to be seen anywhere'. In Gachina he found a local populace recovering from 'two and a half years of Nazi terror'. The hasty retreat of German forces revealed a concentration camp constructed in the centre of the town¹⁵³.

The Germans also set fire to the Gachina palace before leaving. Werth met the palace's curator, a certain Mr Glinka. Glinka exclaimed, 'wasn't it enough to have looted the Palace of its art treasures? Wasn't it enough to have its top floor turned into an officers' brothel?'¹⁵⁴ Pavlovsk and Tsarskoe Selo suffered a similar fate and Werth's experience left him in no doubt that the danger facing Leningrad was 'immense'¹⁵⁵.

Salisbury and Goure both cite Hitler's intention to destroy Leningrad.

Salisbury quotes the notorious German order No.1a 1601/41 which states that 'After the defeat of Soviet Russia there will not be the slightest reason

¹⁵³ Alexander Werth, *Leningrad*, pp. 187-88.

¹⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵ Alexander Werth, *Leningrad*, pp. 188-89.

for the future existence of this large city'¹⁵⁶. Evan Mawdsley makes the important point that if Leningrad had been surrendered to the Nazis as Kiev, Minsk and Khar'kov was 'it is hard to see how this would have saved lives'. Hitler's pronouncements about leveling Leningrad in Mawdsley's view fit 'within the general monstrous policy of starving the Russian population and in particular the cities'¹⁵⁷. In these instances the German army also refused to allow the evacuation of women and children.

Werth spoke to a local army captain who asserted that Leningraders knew 'that they were fighting for their own skins'¹⁵⁸. Correspondingly, if this was the general view held at the time then it can be assumed that Leningraders were aware of Hitler's intentions. On the occasion of the November 1941 celebrations marking the anniversary of the October Revolution German planes dropped leaflets into the city claiming that 'We shall do the bombing on the 6th, and *you* will do the burying on the 7th'¹⁵⁹. Such ruthless enemy propaganda could have left Leningraders in little doubt about German attitudes towards the civilian population. Werth summed up succinctly by stating that this was clearly a 'war of extermination' and that 'no one in his right mind could have' declared Leningrad an 'open city'¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁶ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*pp. 350-51.

¹⁵⁷ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East...*p. 135.

¹⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹ Alexander Werth, *Leningrad*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander Werth, *Leningrad*, p. 129.

CONCLUSION

During recent years the focus of siege publications has shifted away from accounts of military strategies towards survivors' narratives. The publication of *Blokadnaia Kniga* in 1979 initiated this trend and was followed by a series of eye-witness accounts such as Valentin Baikov's *Pamiat Blokadnogo Podrostka* (The Memoirs of a Blockade Teenager) and A.S Nikol'skii's *Leningradskii Al'bom: Risunki, Graviury, Proekty Voennykh Let* (Leningrad Album: Drawings, Etchings and Wartime Designs)¹⁶¹.

One topic which has been neglected until fairly recently is the role of women during the siege. This injustice was partially redressed by Svetlana Aleksievich in her book: *U voiny ne Zhenskoe Litso – Poslednie svideteli* (War does not have a Female Face – The Last Witnesses). Although her collection contains testimonies given by female veterans from across the former Soviet Union it also includes a number of blockade stories¹⁶².

Aleksievich regards *Blokadnaia Kniga* as part of a new emerging genre of Russian historiography which depicts the power of commemoration through vivid stories which are not distanced from the past and which depict unfolding events as if they are passing before your eyes. She notes a general return to a

¹⁶¹ Valentin Baikov's *Pamiat Blokadnogo Podrostka* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1989) and A.S Nikol'skii, *Leningradskii Al'bom: Risunki, Graviury, Proekty Voennykh Let* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1984).

¹⁶² Svetlana Aleksievich, *U voiny ne Zhenskoe Litso*...pp. 1 and 317.

preoccupation with hyper realism which would no doubt have been appreciated by Leningrad's blockade poets.

Perhaps the most emotive quote in Aleksievich's book comes from Zina Prikhod'ka who was four years old when her mother died during the siege.

'We sat frightened and in a state of incomprehension that mama could actually die, leaving us when we were without papa? I remember mama calling over to us smiling. "Never quarrel children" she said. What were we going to quarrel about? There was nothing to fight over. We did not have a doll *or* a mother. At night *babushka* covered mama in a white blanket and put her on the sled. Four of us took the harnesses of the sled... As an adult I am silent, do not talk about it. I just didn't wish to talk'¹⁶³. Prikhod'ka's testimony exists at the boundary of the unspeakable. She does not wish to talk yet somehow feels compelled to tell her story.

Aleksievich's book was followed more recently by Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina's *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose*. This book documents how the siege of Leningrad 'became a woman's experience'¹⁶⁴. As Barbara Engel states, it also demonstrates how oral history 'allows us to see how women inserted themselves into the highly male-gendered discourse of war' through stressing the particularity of

¹⁶³ Svetlana Aleksievich, *U voiny ne Zhenskoe Litso*...pp. 1 and 317.

¹⁶⁴ Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina, *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), and Cynthia Simmons: 'Lifting the Siege...' (p. 43).

individual experience as opposed to heroic deeds which emphasised 'the achievements of the Soviet state'¹⁶⁵.

In summary, the relaxation of censorship in Russia which occurred following the fall of Communism has not led to the collapse of the myth of war. In addition as Kirschenbaum states the fact that 'war invaded a city steeped in myth and memory meant that the ghosts of the blockade inhabited an already haunted landscape'¹⁶⁶. In other words, as an already existing site of memory Leningrad was a natural location for the production of new myths.

Despite the recent release of numerous medical documents and Secret Police (NKVD) files in John Barber's *Life And Death in Besieged Leningrad, 1941-44* and Nikolai Lomagin's *Neizvestnaia Blokada (The Unknown Blockade)* the heroic myth of Leningrad's defiance remains intact. Fears expressed by Daniil Granin that revelations about cannibalism could potentially undermine this myth have turned out to be unfounded. This is because siege discourse, especially amongst survivors is sacred narrative and at the root of these stories lies that sense of ambivalence which charts both the sacred and the profane.

Perhaps, in terms of historical documentation Salisbury was correct in stating that no real revelations about the blockade have emerged during recent decades.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara Alpern Engel, 'The Womanly Face of War: Soviet Women Remember World War II' in Nicole Ann Dombrowski, *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent* (New York and London: Garland Inc., 1999), pp. 152-53.

¹⁶⁶ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...*p. 15.

Nevertheless, he was wrong in assuming that ‘The story as told here is complete’¹⁶⁷. Salisbury overlooks a fundamental factor in siege testimony. It is not just the story itself but the *manner* in which the story is told which is important. Until we fully comprehend the nature and reasons behind these thought processes the story of the siege will never be complete.

¹⁶⁷ See also p. 14.

ORAL TESTIMONY AND THE VERACITY OF LONG-TERM MEMORY

The study of oral testimonies, especially those charting events which took place in the distant past inevitably gives rise to questions regarding the reliability of memory. Memories of the siege of Leningrad related by survivors contain various popular myths which are accompanied by evaluative statements about the significance of certain events. Consequently, the functional aspect of the recitation of such myths is primarily a didactic one. At the same time it is the persistence of these myths and the fact that so many *blokadniki* refer to the same tableau of heroic tales that forces us to confront the nature of long-term memory.

These accounts contain (as we shall later), remarkably detailed recollections of key lifetime events. Memory of these events may also be accompanied by strong feelings such as guilt, pain, remorse or happiness and may be triggered by specific sights, objects or smells. But it is not sufficient to maintain that these stories are accurate simply because they are related so vividly. It is necessary to examine whether there is some scientific basis for the persistence of long-term memories.

Experimental psychology and recent studies in oral history provide us with a framework for a deeper understanding of the functions of long-term memory and lend support to the argument that recollections of distant events can be surprisingly accurate and

reliable. Oral history is also emerging as an interdisciplinary field of research. Oral testimony and the study thereof is consequently contested ground just as memory itself can be a source of competing viewpoints.

A brief example of this potential conflict of interests is demonstrated by discussions surrounding commemorative events held in Moscow in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE Day). The BBC in their *European Press Review* of this event noted a feeling of unease expressed across Europe's press¹. The prevalence of posters bearing Stalin's image was a source of concern while the placement of the Ukrainian president Viktor Iushchenko at the distant end of the central podium caused some additional comment.

The BBC discussed international reports that Vladimir Putin was attempting quietly to rehabilitate Stalin². The Russian government on the other hand was eager to portray Victory in Europe as a moral victory for the Red Army over the brutality of Fascism. Vladimir Putin pronounced Victory in Europe Day as 'the dearest, the most emotional and the most inclusive holiday in our country. For the people of the former Soviet Union, it will forever remain a day of the people's great heroic deed, and for the countries of Europe and the entire planet - the day on which the world was saved'³.

¹ 'European Press Review', BBC News, UK Edition, 10 May 2005 <bbc.co.uk> [accessed 27/08/2005].
'Leaders Mourn Soviet wartime dead', BBC News UK Edition, 9 May 2005 <bbc.co.uk> [accessed 27/08/2005].

² Jonathan Marcus 'Russia's Controversial Celebrations', BBC News UK Edition <bbc.co.uk> [accessed 27/08/2005].

³ 'Full Text of Putin VE Day Speech', BBC News, UK Edition, 9 May 2005 <bbc.co.uk> [accessed 27/08/2005].

Nevertheless, the grand-narrative of liberation was undermined by a counter-narrative which reminded us that 1945 brought the countries of Eastern Europe under Stalin's shadow. This was illustrated most clearly by the refusal of the presidents of Lithuania and Estonia to attend. While the victory parade was an attempt to regain some of Russia's recently lost prestige, memory of Stalin became a destabilising force which threatened to undermine the master-narrative of heroism and mourning for the fallen.

Philip Boobbyer states that during the Soviet era 'Private memories were an essential source of alternative values...These oral histories show, however, that memory of the past was never even nearly abolished in the Soviet Union. The potential for an outburst of 'truth-telling' was always there. Even in the Stalin era people had access to a rich reservoir of private memories. ..It is not surprising that *glasnost*' introduced an outburst of truth-telling that 'was driven from below'⁴.

In this instance, it is the image of Stalin himself that is 'driven from below'. The most striking example, was a picture of a Ukrainian lady dressed in black walking apparently unnoticed across a park⁵. In her arms she held a huge portrait of Stalin which almost obscured her from view. Stephen Legg has written that, 'memory itself has also

⁴ Philip Boobbyer, 'Truth-telling, Conscience and Dissent in Late Soviet Russia: Evidence from Oral Histories', *European History Quarterly* 30:4 (2000) 553-585 (p. 580). He also discusses the divergence of public conformity and private views as an expression of a kind of 'behavioral bilingualism' which was common in Soviet society (p. 554).

⁵ 'In Pictures: Red Square Celebration', Picture no.8 out of 12, BBC News UK Edition <bbc.co.uk>, 9 May 2005 [accessed 27/08/2005].

been considered a destabilising force against historical 'grand narratives'.

Memory can challenge dominant interpretations of the past and stress the local and particular...'⁶ In this regard individual memories can bring about a democratic repositioning of how history is remembered. The presidents of Estonia and Lithuania stayed away because they objected to the presentation of 9 May 1945 as a day of liberation. The Ukrainian lady reminded us of those who resent the detachment of these commemorations from the image and role of Stalin⁷. This is one example of how a site of memory, in this case Moscow's Red Square can become fiercely contested ground ⁸.

The study of oral testimony and the act of interviewing respondents also raises a number of delicate issues. For psychologists the aim is often to assist respondents in recovering traumatic memories and to help them understand why this can become a cathartic and healing process. Oral historians, on the other hand, are seeking through the study of oral testimony to gain a deeper understanding of the past.

⁶ Stephen Legg, 'Memory and Nostalgia', *Cultural Geographies*, 11: 1 (2004), 99-107 (p. 105).

⁷ Putin's speech in some ways echoed Stalin's own wartime pronouncements. Most notably in his opening address to the 'Dear citizens of Russia, distinguished visitors, comrade soldiers and sailors, sergeants and sergeant-majors, army and navy warrant officers, comrade officers, generals and admirals, I would like to congratulate you on the anniversary of the great victory, on the day of peace and triumph of justice, on the day when good triumphed over evil and freedom triumphed over tyranny' (same BBC source as above). Nevertheless, there was no mention of Stalin's name during the course of the speech.

⁸ Kate Darian-Smith also explores the concept of memory as contested ground. She notes that an intersection exists between official commemorations and private recollections. It is at the point of this intersection that cultural meanings of wartime are constantly being negotiated. Kate Darian-Smith, *War Stories: Remembering the Australian Home Front During the Second World War*, a chapter in *Memory and History in 20th Century Australia*, Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (editors) (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 137-38.

The author's interviews with thirty siege survivors found them to be extremely energetic and invigorated by the process of story-telling. Indeed, they appeared to savour the opportunity to relate their experiences. Nevertheless, it is clearly easier to interview *blokadniki* than some other groups because their stories form part of a meta-narrative which focuses upon heroic resistance.

Gelinada Grinchenko highlighted some of the complexities of interviewing veterans in a paper presented at the 2005 *Annual Conference of the Oral History Society*⁹. She based her conclusions upon a series of interviews she had conducted with former Ukrainian *Ostarbeiters*. This subject had been effectively censored during the Soviet era, so much so that several of her respondents asked her if she had been sent by the KGB.

In the case of Grinchenko's study her research is particularly valuable because it highlights the potential that oral history possesses as a means of retrieving personal memories which were formerly regarded as politically undesirable. Thus, a topic hitherto officially proscribed by the authorities becomes part of a new and open dialogue charting the experiences of a group whose stories were previously unrecorded.

⁹ Gelinada Grinchenko, 'Ostarbeiters of the Third Reich: Remembering and Forgetting as the Strategies of Survival'. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Oral History Society: *Using the War: Changing Memories of World War II*, King's College London, 1-3 of July 2005. This, and subsequent papers cited from the conference are unpublished and on a disc. They will be referenced from this point onwards as 2005 OHC.

Let us return to the idea of oral history as contested ground. At the same conference a significant proportion of the papers presented were by psychologists. For psychologists the concept of testimony as 'life review' is particularly important and in addition the identification of effective coping skills which can initiate a process of healing for the respondent¹⁰.

The danger presented by the cohabitation of this research space is that psychologists may find themselves unwittingly playing the role of amateur historians while the reverse may become true for oral historians. Consequently, while acknowledging the positive role which experimental psychology can play in the retrieval of memories the focus of this study is primarily a cultural analysis of siege testimonies as opposed to an attempt to explore the psychological consequences of bearing witness.

Nevertheless, experimental psychology is relevant to this study in that it confirms the resilience of certain long-term memories. The veritability of long-term memory is a key challenge to any oral historian working with World War II testimonies. Correspondingly, it is necessary to explain briefly why experimental psychologists believe that certain long-term memories can be remarkably reliable.

Gillian Cohen, George Kiss and Martin Le Voi describe autobiographic memory as 'a special kind of episodic memory which is concerned with specific life events which have self-reference; that is, they have personal reference to oneself'¹¹. The place and

¹⁰ See also Marvin J. Westwood, 'A Group Life Review Program for Canadian Veterans', 2005 OHC.

¹¹ Gillian Cohen, George Kiss and Martin Le Voi, *Memory: Current Issues* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1993), p. 50.

time in which events are experienced is called the *spatial-temporal context*.

Autobiographical memories can also be either *declarative* or *experiential* in nature. In addition, they discuss instances of what are called *flashbulb* memories.

Flashbulb memories are recollections of key lifetime events such as for example the death of John F. Kennedy¹². Hence, the assertion that many people can remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard about president Kennedy's assassination. Consequently, individuals can experience a process of *analepsis* even many years after the event which triggers a flashback to a particular experience.

In war veterans a certain sight or smell can initiate a *flashbulb* memory. Steve Weiss, an American veteran described recently finding himself in the middle of a busy road in London. Suddenly, he realised that he had been looking for snipers. 'Didn't the war end sixty years ago? Evidently, not for me! The trigger was a white window curtain fluttering against an opaque background'¹³.

Lawrence L. Langer memorably describes Holocaust memory as 'an insomniac faculty, whose mental eyes have never slept'¹⁴. Charlotte Delbo, a survivor of Auschwitz wrote: 'Auschwitz is so deeply etched in my memory that I cannot forget one moment of it. – So you are living with Auschwitz? – no, I live next to it. Auschwitz... is enveloped in the skin of memory...Unlike the snake's skin, the skin of memory does

¹² Gillian Cohen, George Kiss and Martin Le Voi, *Memory...*p. 55.

¹³ Steve Weiss, 'Memory: the power of the mind to think of a past that no longer exists poses both empirical and psychological problems', 2005 OHC, p. 8.

¹⁴ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991), pp. 11-12.

not renew itself...In this underlying memory sensations remain intact'. Delbo describes herself as 'a twofold being' containing within both ordinary and 'deep-lying memory...Deep memory preserves sensations, physical imprints. It is the memory of the senses'¹⁵.

Discourse analysis separates what is termed the immediate mode or 'conversations when people verbalize experiences that are directly related to their environments' and the displaced mode which consists of the process of remembering and in addition of imagining¹⁶. Yet, the process of analepsis almost merges the two as the distant remembered event is experienced as if it is actually occurring in the present.

Steve Weiss asked himself the question: 'Sixty-one years have passed since this concatenation of events, and these experiences converted to memory have remained my companions without any appreciable loss of sharpness of detail. Why such persistence, vivid recall, and so little decay? Is continuity, identity, and survival involved in some way - even immortality?'¹⁷

He goes on to describe 'two kinds of memory, short term (STM) and Long term (LTM), involving at least two different physiological mechanisms and possibly different brain regions. LTM is a cortical function, consisting of a field rather than a point, and the temporal lobes are likely to be involved in memory processes.

¹⁵ Charlotte Delbo, *Days and Memory*, R. Lamont (transl., Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001), pp. 46-47.

¹⁶ Wallace Chafe, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: The Flow of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 196-98.

¹⁷ Steve Weiss, 'Memory...', p. 2.

STM usually decays over a period of minutes or hours, and if no transfer takes place from STM to LTM, it is irretrievably lost as STM decays. However, when a transfer does take place, LTM is most difficult to erase and is one of its most durable features, other than scar tissue¹⁸.

Elizabeth F. Loftus and John C. Yuille have also described this process of analepsis as a memory trace. 'The Memory trace is something that can be revitalised at a later time, causing the event to be re-experienced'¹⁹. Martin Conway notes the stubbornness of such memories towards decay. He concurs that *flashbulb* memories 'are remarkably consistent across many years...' and that they possess an 'immunity to forgetting'²⁰.

Of course, traumatic memories can sometimes surface without warning. This is why Steve Weiss suddenly found himself looking for snipers in the middle of a London thoroughfare. Dori Laub observes that Holocaust survivors often feel compelled to tell their stories. She asserts that 'storytelling is connected with survival and that survivors "need to *tell* and thus come to *know*" their own stories'²¹.

It is clear that the mind can freeze certain memories and that these memories can subsequently remain unchanged over substantial periods of time. Bessel A. van der

¹⁸ Steve Weiss, 'Memory...', p. 3.

¹⁹ Elizabeth F. Loftus and John C. Yuille, 'Departure from Reality in Human Perception and Memory', in *Memory Consolidation: Psychobiology of Cognition*, Herbert Weingartner and Elizabeth S. Parker, editors (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1984), 163-84, p. 165.

²⁰ Martin A. Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1990), pp. 76 and 87.

²¹ Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth, editor (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1995), 61-75, p. 63.

Kolk and Onno van der Hart write that trauma victims relive time and again the same traumatic episodes and that the memory of these episodes is 'unmodified'²². Their own research was conducted with victims remembering events up to thirty years afterwards and they also describe a process whereby the mind freezes certain memories.

Kai Erikson has gone further in discussing the communal aspect of remembering, 'trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can'²³. Trauma can thus potentially create communities. In regard to old age, the testimonies of various World War II veterans demonstrate that although some parts of the memory become poorer 'others remain largely intact'. It appears that this is particularly true in the case of certain smells, the recollection of which can be 'retained for long periods'²⁴. Similarly, Elizabeth Loftus notes that we may forget certain details immediately after an event but from then on 'forgetting becomes more and more gradual...'²⁵

The Holocaust survivor Benjamin Wilkormiski wrote that traumatic memories are not so much remembered as re-experienced or relived. This occurs as an automatic

²² Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 425-54, p. 172.

²³ Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 185-6.

²⁴ Alan J. Parkin, *Memory: Phenomena, Experiment and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 172. See also R. Brown, and J. Kulik, 'Flashbulb Memory', *Cognition*, 5, 73-99, 1977.

²⁵ Elizabeth F. Loftus, *Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1979), p. 53.

response to an associative image or link, which causes the past to surface. For example, in one passage the smell of bread transports the young Wilkormiski from the surroundings of his Swiss orphanage to the day in the camps when he met his mother and received a piece of bread from her. The smell of the bread ‘envelope[s]’ the narrator, it evokes “pictures” in him, which take him back into the past²⁶.

For Elie Cohen, a survivor of Auschwitz it was the simple act of clipping his nails which produced *flashbulb* memories. ‘When I am trimming my fingernails and throw the cut nails into the fire, the smell takes me back to Auschwitz. And burning. You know how evocative of memory the sense of smell is. But the memories are not accompanied by pain; they just return. Not that they have ever really gone away. They are always there, and I live with them’²⁷.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that these memories are always recalled in chronological order. They create strong associations between different events but they substitute causality for chronology. For oral historians the challenge presented by such testimonies is that they present ‘facts’ with accompanying ‘philosophies’. The respondents are theorising about the past as well as simply remembering it.

²⁶ Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood*, 1939-1948, Carol Brown Janeway transl. (London: Picador, 1996), p. 46.

²⁷ Anton Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors* (London: Grafton Books, 1988), p. 382.

Consequently, recollections of key lifetime events are often accompanied by 'comments, explanations, evaluations, (and) contextualisations'²⁸.

These contextualisations can assist the oral historian in finding out more about the respondents' cultural backgrounds, attitudes and about various coping strategies which enable them to comprehend and evaluate their own stories. On the other hand, the oral historian should be cautious about attempting to assist respondents in the process of mental healing. This is a task for psychologists rather than historians working with oral testimony.

While acknowledging that long-term memories of traumatic events can remain remarkably intact it is also necessary to engage in some comparative analysis in order to ascertain the plausibility of a given story against the background of various similar narratives. Correspondingly, it was necessary to compare the interviews conducted for this project with a substantial body of several hundred other testimonies by siege survivors²⁹.

What is clear is that oral testimonies demonstrate that different societies contain commonly accepted myths. During the course of this comparative analysis it became clear that *blokadniki* utilised shared codes, symbols, words and belief-systems in order to describe their past experiences. Consequently, it

²⁸ Dr Daniela Koleva, 'Memories of the War and the War of Memories in Post-communist Bulgaria', 2005 OHC, p. 10.

²⁹ See for example the chapter, 'Between Myth and History: Siege Testimony as "Historiographic Metafiction"'.

was in the area of mythopoetic production that notable consistencies between siege narratives arose. The most prominent of these shared myths is the ideal of the unified wartime community which is remarkably resilient³⁰.

Wendy Singer, concurs that the plausibility of a certain story can be demonstrated through comparative analysis. Citing her experiences of interviewing Indian residents of the Pandaul region she concludes that these stories 'demonstrate their own veracity. This is most common among oral narratives, which prove their authenticity by relating one history to another and associating incidents with commonly accepted events'³¹.

Oral history, as noted earlier can also perform a democratic function. Gelinada Grinchenko's research is one such example. In this sense individual narratives can disrupt the flow of national history 'by presenting a variety of understandings of the significance and meaning of wartime memories'³².

This is particularly true in the case of Switzerland where official memory of the war maintained that the Swiss nation was innocent of any complicity with the Nazi

³⁰ See chapter "Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!": Myths of Patriotism in Contemporary Siege Testimony', pp. 47-48. Quote by Svetlana Gachina.

³¹ Wendy Singer, *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History-Making* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), pp. 99 and 302.

³² Pamela Wakewich and Helen Smith, 'The Politics of "Selective" Memory: Re-visioning Canadian Women's Wartime Work in the Public Record', 2005 OHC.

regime. This is an example of screen memory (*deckerinnerung*) which prevents any discussions of topics which could potentially undermine the myth of Swiss neutrality.

Project *Archimob* consisted of around 500 interviews with Swiss witnesses of World War II. The interviews with specific groups such as members of leftist political parties, Jews and women resulted in various dissonances arising between official and private memory. The preferred official memory of World War II emphasised Switzerland's military neutrality and overlooked economic cooperation with the Axis powers. On the other hand, many of the respondents interviewed as part of this project acknowledged and criticised the Swiss elite's fondness for National Socialism³³.

Clearly, *Archimob* gave sections of the Swiss community a voice which had hitherto been effectively silenced by official screen memories. Joan E. Denman and Padmini Broomfield have also attempted to give a voice to marginalised groups through their work with African American and Indian veterans of World War II³⁴. These examples demonstrate how oral history can play a key role in

³³ Christof Dejung, 'The official view of the War as screen memory: How World War Two was remembered in Switzerland', 2005 OHC. Dejung writes of a respondent called simply Mister K. who highlights past sympathies of the Swiss elite for National Socialism, (p. 5). He also concludes his paper with the observation that 'Oral history – although it is not capable to say how the past "really" was – can help to examine the differences between publicly and privately expressed memories and can help to understand how people cope with the dissonances between these two different types of commemoration of the past' (p. 7).

³⁴ Joan E. Denman, 'Unappreciated Then, Unrecognized Now: African Americans in World War II', 2005 OHC. Padmini Broomfield, 'Remembering Forgotten Heroes: Exploring the Indian Army contribution to the two world wars', 2005 OHC.

revising history by highlighting the contribution of ethnic minorities to the war effort.

Robert Atkinson writes that, 'We seem to be recognising more now that everyone has a story...and that they are indeed important stories'³⁵. Life stories carry within themselves 'timeless themes and motifs found in a living mythology... The life story is inherently interdisciplinary'. Each life story is 'full of personally sacred elements, valid (and) valuable'³⁶. Atkinson is making a link between personal testimony and sacred narrative. These stories are sacred because the elements within them are considered sacred by those who recall them.

These sacred elements 'valid (and) valuable)' form 'sense-making systems' which are governed by 'local social practices and literary conventions'³⁷. In other words, the sacred elements contained within individual testimonies can also connect with the 'living mythology' of the community. In this sense they are socially anchored: 'What we say and do has meaning only within a framework of cultural knowledge – not linguistic, but communicative, competence'³⁸. Autobiographical remembering

³⁵ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods, no. 44 (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 3 and 9.

³⁶ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, pp. 10 and 20.

³⁷ Stuart Blackburn, 'Life Histories as Narrative Strategy: Prophecy, Song, and Truth-Telling in Tamil Tales and Legends', chapter in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, editors (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004), 203-26, p. 204.

³⁸ Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 371.

also consists of a process whereby we 'map ourselves'. In telling our stories we engage in 'special surveys of personal experience, retrospective and/or ongoing',³⁹.

Oral testimony can also perform a restorative function in that it can potentially breakdown meta-narratives presented by the mainstream media or by governments and institutions. History can therefore be viewed as fragmentary as it is constructed from a complex framework of 'little stories' which are 'too disparate to permit a universal point of view',⁴⁰. Rainer Schultze has noted an increasing debate amongst historians about how history should be remembered. He notes a shift away from 'political structures and social groups' towards individuals. He regards this as an expression of a change in the mode of inquiry and of a search for historical sources with greater authenticity and immediacy than archival records',⁴¹.

The study of individual testimonies can also potentially narrow the gap between memory and history. Testimonies play a central role in this process by allowing stories to emerge which are told by 'we who were there',⁴². History and memory do not exist in isolation but overlap and challenge one another. 'Memory always evokes

³⁹ Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves, Canadian Women's Autobiography in English*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill, Queen's UP, 1993). Buss describes the work of the oral historian as being akin to a kind of archeological map-making, p. 10.

⁴⁰ The concept of competing little narratives is explored by C. Behan McCullagh in *The Truth of History* (London: Routledge, 1998). History is viewed as 'fragmentary' and cultural representations of these 'little stories' are 'too disparate to permit a universal point of view'. Culture becomes a patchwork of 'little narratives', p. 300.

⁴¹ Rainer Schulze, 'Memory in German History: Fragmented Noises or Meaningful Voices of the Past?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39: 4 (2004), 637-48 (pp. 637-38).

⁴² Joanna Burke, "Remembering" War, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39: 4 (2004), 473-85 (p. 485).

anxiety in the historian. But this anxiety is to be embraced: it enables us to catch a sense of awe about individuals in the past'. Memory can also 'challenge dominant interpretations of the past and stress the local and particular',⁴³.

In conclusion, long-term memory of traumatic or key lifetime events can be astonishingly detailed and vivid. This is demonstrated not only by recollections of war veterans but is also supported by a substantial body of research carried out within the fields of both oral history and experimental psychology. In addition, as Eric Berlatsky has noted, the localised and relative truth of personal (and communal) memory is often regarded as a means of reconstituting identity and fighting repressive power⁴⁴.

While understanding that personal testimonies are not in themselves proof that certain events took place and that they have certain limitations concerning factuality they nevertheless present counter narratives which reclaim historical experience back towards the individual. In short, individual memories are not only of value in and of themselves but can become modes of discourse which 'interrogate and challenge the politics of "selective" national histories',⁴⁵.

The interviews conducted for this study were undertaken with a view to concentrating upon 'little stories' of siege experience. These 'little stories' make the history of the

⁴³ Stephen Legg, 'Memory and Nostalgia', (p. 105).

⁴⁴ Eric Berlatsky, *Memory as Forgetting, The Problem of the Postmodern in Kundera's The Book of Laughter and Forgetting and Spiegelman's Maus*, *Cultural Critique* 55 (Autumn 2003), 101-151, pp. 121-122.

⁴⁵ Pamela Wakewich and Helen Smith, 'The Politics of 'Selective' Memory: Re-visioning Canadian Women's Wartime Work in the Public Record', 2005 OHC (p. 18).

siege more fragmentary as each testimony places a different emphasis on a particular topic, wartime activity or location within the city. Nevertheless, they also demonstrate that personal as well as national histories can be selective.

Robert Atkinson identifies a selected memoranda 'full of personally sacred elements, valid (and) valuable'. These form part of a 'living mythology' which brings together survivors and their 'imagined' community. The process of autobiographical map making can only be achieved through reference to a defined framework of cultural knowledge. Consequently, the 'living mythology' contained within individual siege testimonies is also part of the 'living mythology' of siege discourse as a whole.

Blokadniki nevertheless challenge the politics of selective siege histories by discussing topics such as cannibalism and by providing graphic depictions of the horrors of siege life. Soviet historiography tended to eschew these themes in favour of broad heroic narratives. On the other hand, the admiration a number of these veterans still feel for the leadership of Stalin also demonstrates the complexity of this relationship⁴⁶. Thus, while there are notable contradictions between these 'little stories' and sanitised accounts provided by Soviet historiography there are also points of mutual interest.

Essentially, there is an unspoken agreement concerning the perceived sacrality of the siege story as a whole. In this regard, while much of the detail contained

⁴⁶ Refer also to "Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!": Myths of Patriotism in Contemporary Siege Discourse', (pp. 64-78).

within individual testimonies moves away from earlier official siege discourse, it nevertheless echoes the overall tendency of Soviet historiography to colour siege accounts with sacred associations. Consequently, while schisms appear at the local level the concept of siege discourse as sacred narrative brings together both official and personal siege narratives. Both strands of discourse perpetuate the 'living mythology' of the siege. As Boris Eikhenbaum wrote, the siege 'united history and memory' and 'the memory of the whole people – that is itself history'⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Boris Eikhenbaum, *O Proze*, (Leningrad, 1969), p. 374.

INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

Andrea Frisch identifies a key issue concerning oral testimony by observing that a temporal gap exists 'between the moment of witnessing and the moment of bearing witness'¹. Yet, she challenges Derrida's assertion that this 'produces a fundamental ontological divide within testimony'. Derrida maintained that 'pure' testimony was 'impossible testimony'. The instant one bears witness this temporal gap begins to open up and consequently testimony can never lay claim to being absolute truth.

It is clear that this temporal gap is considerable when biographers are recalling events which took place over sixty years ago. Nevertheless, this gap is considerably less problematic than it may initially seem. Frisch acknowledges that 'Derrida of course also suggests that we can never be certain that what a testimony claims to tell us is true (or truthful)'. On the other hand she states that Derrida overlooks the ethical foundations which have 'historically distinguished testimony from other, purely epistemic discourses'².

Siege testimonies are also constructed upon ethical foundations. The plausibility of individual testimonies can be ascertained through comparison with historiography and with other siege narratives. Yet, the ethical principles which govern these statements emerge from a compulsion to depict a traumatic past in as faithful

¹ Andrea Frisch, 'The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective', *Discourse*, 5.1&2 (Winter & Spring 2003), 36-54 (p. 39).

² Andrea Frisch, 'The Ethics of Testimony ...' (pp. 48-49).

a manner as possible. In almost every case the respondents' demeanour, poise and speech changed dramatically when they turned from normal conversation to the subject of the *blokada*. The retired workers at the *Elektrosila* plant expressed amazement at the testimony of their colleague Vladimir Gavrilov. Iurii Semeonovich exclaimed, 'We have never seen him like this before. He is usually so quiet and does not speak so fast!'³

This was also evident during the interviews with veterans in the small town of Kolpino where frail elderly *blokadniki* suddenly launched into passionate testimonies delivered with high intensity and confidence⁴. In group settings there is a clear ethical dimension which emerges when survivors are testifying in front of one another. It can be assumed that in discussing this 'sacred theme' in the presence of other witnesses they would not seek to undermine their narratives by deliberately speaking untruths. Consequently, the ethical foundations upon which these testimonies are based are closely linked with the concept of siege testimony as sacred narrative.

As Frisch observes during the medieval period defending one's testimony 'demanded an ethico-ontologic rather than an ethico-epistemic commitment on the

³ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 12.

⁴ The testimony of Natalia Rudina was a particularly striking example. Interview with Natalia Rudina, *Klub Veteranov*, Kolpino, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL10/JC/09/06/KV, 1-32. See also "Za Rodinu! Za Stalina": Myths of Patriotism in Contemporary Siege Testimony' (pp. 250-51).

part of the witness'. Correspondingly, 'in the medieval period, perjury has no special relationship to fiction; it is instead, quite simply, bad faith'⁵. Similarly, through bearing false testimony veterans would be engaging in an act of bad faith which would be condemned by fellow survivors.

Frisch also reminds us that testimony will always have an 'intimate relationship' with fiction. This feature of bearing witness is explored in the next chapter where siege testimonies are described as 'historiographic metafiction'. Yet, by remodeling our vision of the past they also remind us that historiography is simply another means of 'representing reality'⁶. Experienced based testimony teaches 'us that we only know the past through its texts, documentary evidence, discursive inscription, and traces in the present'⁷.

Traumatic memories also challenge Derrida's assumption that 'pure' testimony is 'impossible testimony'⁸. Frisch queries this by stating that 'it is not clear that "pure" testimony is impossible'⁹. The resistance of *flashbulb* memories to decay has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Siege memories are also often

⁵ Andrea Frisch, 'The Ethics of Testimony ...', (p. 44).

⁶⁻⁷ See also Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo as Ethical Deconstruction and Reconstruction', *Critique: studies in contemporary fiction*, 46:3 (Spring 2005), 267-82 (pp. 267-268).

⁸ Derrida wrote that 'The moment one is a witness and the moment one attests, *bears witness*, the instant one gives testimony, there must also be a temporal sequence [. . .]. Consequently, the instant is [. . .] divided, destroyed by what it nonetheless makes possible—testimony'. Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), pp. 32-33.

⁹ Andrea Frisch, 'The Ethics of Testimony ...', (p. 39).

triggered by impulses which respondents do not necessarily have complete control over. They are memories of the senses which emerge from reflexive mental processes creating scenic flashbacks. For example, Iurii Semeonovich, Viktor Oleinikov and Anna Sorokina retained complete composure during the majority of their interviews. Yet, in each case they suddenly stumbled upon a scenic memory which triggered an outpouring of emotion causing them momentarily to breakdown. For Semeonovich it was the near death of his mother during their evacuation. For Oleinikov it was the sight of a dead mother and her small child and for Sorokina it was the loss of various members of her family¹⁰.

Derrida calls this process the ‘hauntology’ of bearing witness¹¹. Yet, it is this very process which bridges that temporal gap which Derrida regards as inherently problematic. However brief, these hauntings make ‘pure’ testimony possible. This is particularly the case with unelaborated scenic memories recalled by survivors such as Igor’ Suvorov and Elena Vishnevskaja who were small children at the time¹².

As Frisch states Derrida’s ‘deconstructive reading of testimony depends upon the most extreme version of the presupposition he offers—namely, that the kind of testimony he is discussing claims for itself the value of something like objective

¹⁰ Interview with Anna Sorokina, *Klub Veteranov*, Kolpino, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 11.

¹¹ See also Colin Davis, ‘Hauntology, spectres and phantoms’, *French Studies*, 59:3 (2005) 373-379.

¹² Interview with Igor’ Suvorov, Newcastle, April 2006, transcript, p. 5. Interview with Elena Vishnevskaja, BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR.

truth’¹³. The respondents did not make the claim that their testimonies were objective truth. Aleksandr Lodkin’s assertion that the siege was a ‘sacred theme’ precludes objectivity from the outset. Yet, their recollections do emerge from experienced based knowledge and it is the manner in which these experiences are interpreted which confirms their membership of the ‘imagined’ community.

Bearing witness is also a performative act. As Frisch correctly states, testimonies must ‘be taken on faith or not at all’¹⁴. In making statements about this ‘sacred’ topic *blokadniki* are *performing* a range of commonly shared beliefs. According to Frisch performance is central ‘in the very act of bearing witness’¹⁵. The dialogic frameworks contained within siege testimonies are the consequence of both conscious and unconscious processes. Each *blokadnik* is the ‘member of an ethical community’, and membership of that community is predicated upon an awareness that they owe their ‘very existence to others’¹⁶. Even the *blokadniki* who were interviewed alone were *performing* beliefs in relation to imagined ‘others’.

Frisch asserts that ‘it is possible to approach testimony in profoundly ethical terms’¹⁷. Similarly, the ethical systems which govern siege testimony and the fact that they are based upon lived experience provide compelling motives for truth-telling. In addition, as so many of these memories emerge from sensory triggers creating vivid scenic flashbacks the gap between past and present is not as problematic as it may outwardly seem.

¹³⁻¹⁵ Andrea Frisch, ‘The Ethics of Testimony ...’ (pp. 42, 44 and 45).

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Andrea Frisch, ‘The Ethics of Testimony ...’ (pp. 51 and 53).

THE RESPONDENTS

In total thirty *blokadniki* took part in the interviews. In addition, a seventy minute interview was conducted and recorded onto tape with Ol'ga Prout the director of the museum '*A muzy ne molchali*' ('The muses were not silent')¹⁸. This museum is situated on the *Naberezhnaiava Reki Priazhki*.

Finally, further discussions took place with a wide range of academics and members of St. Petersburg's cultural scene in order to ascertain how the siege is perceived by younger St. Petersburgers. This was not a fundamental part of the study but these conversations were useful in gaining a more intimate knowledge of how the blockade is regarded among the broader population. These discussions demonstrated that the siege remains very much in the consciousness of younger St. Petersburgers as a defining moment in the city's history

The respondents themselves came from a wide variety of backgrounds including academics, musicians, former members of the armed services, and ordinary working people. The youngest respondent was Igor' Suvorov who was only five years old in 1941 but nevertheless retained some vivid memories of the early months of the siege. Most of the interviewees were born in the mid to late 1920's while several of the veterans interviewed in the town of Kolpino were in their mid eighties.

All the interviewees stated very clearly their willingness to take part in this study and that they were happy to have their statements quoted in the final thesis.

¹⁸ Interview with Ol'ga Prout, St. Petersburg, July 2003, tape reference, BLA/JC/06/03/OP, transcript pp. 1-17.

Nevertheless, in the interests of data protection their actual names have been replaced by pseudonyms. This respects feelings of the respondents who often related very personal stories which were at times painful for them to share. On the other hand, all the respondents were extremely eager to discuss their experiences and on several occasions the interviews had to be politely curtailed, especially those given within a group setting.

The first interview took place in November 2001 with Aleksandra Demidova. This discussion subsequently became the initial impetus for the thesis. A further meeting took place with Demidova in July 2003. The second interview with Aleksandra Arkhipova, a retired geography teacher took place in April 2003, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her elder sister was stationed on the frozen lake Ladoga during 1942, a transportation route subsequently immortalised as *the road of life*.

These meetings were followed by further interviews conducted in July 2003 which took place in St. Petersburg. Ol'ga Rozanova was interviewed with her husband, who is also a *blokadnik* but he made only occasional comments during the discussion. Rozanova is a retired school teacher whose specialist subject was the German language. Consequently, she was careful to distinguish between the ideology of Fascism and German history and culture which she greatly admired.

Svetlana Gachina is a retired music theory teacher who taught previously at the Rimsky-Korsakov State Music Conservatory. Today she resides in central St. Petersburg in the same flat in which she lived through the 900 days. Sergei and Tat'iana Goncharenko live on the outskirts of the city. Sergei Pavlovich was a sailor in the Baltic fleet and is also a veteran of the Finnish War of 1939-40. Tat'iana Ivanovna worked previously as a nurse.

A further dialogue took place over the telephone with the composer Valentina Kuznetsova. Kuznetsova was not able to meet in person but spoke for around forty minutes about her siege experiences. The contents of the interview were immediately written down in order to make a transcript of the conversation. These initial respondents (apart from Igor' Suvorov) were born between 1922 and 1927.

The second series of interviews was conducted in September 2006 in St. Petersburg. Elena Vishnevskaja and Viktoriia Ruslanova worked for many years as members of staff at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. The meetings took place in the museum which is situated on the University Embankment opposite from the Hermitage Museum. Vishnevskaja is the youngest member of the second group of interviewees and was born in 1934. The remainder were born in the early to mid 1920's. Tat'iana Letenkova is a retired French linguist. Her testimony, like that of Vishnevskaja and Ruslanova reflected her academic background.

Tat'iana Letenkova distanced herself from other veterans who were members of official organisations. Her testimony was also notable for its absence of patriotic statements.

Aleksandr Cherapukhin is a retired submariner who was in his mid teens during the blockade. The meeting took place in a *Klub Veteranov* or Veterans' Club which is situated close to the Institute of Technology in the city centre. Cherapukhin and Lodkin's testimonies differed from Letenkova and Vishnevskaja in that they reflected their military backgrounds. They were though, remarkably candid about delicate subjects such as foreign spies and cannibalism.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

Four sets of group interviews took place and they were all conducted in September 2006. The first was arranged at the *Elektrosila* plant in the south of the city where a group of *blokadniki* who were former workers at the plant gave a series of individual testimonies. Their narratives tended to focus upon life in and around the factory. Two separate discussions took place in the same veterans' club where Viktor Lodkin was interviewed. The final interviews took place in the small town of Kolpino situated to the south of St. Petersburg. These narratives were the most patriotic of all the

testimonies although they included some of the most graphic depictions of the kind of daily violence which Leningraders faced.

Individual interviews were compared with group discussions to ascertain whether survivors behaved differently in the presence of other veterans. Certainly, individual interviews conducted in private homes allowed the discussion to unfold without the constraint of time limits. Nevertheless, the group interviews contained surprisingly frank and personal details.

At times *blokadniki* would also assist one another by raising a particular topic which prompted additional narratives. This was particularly the case during the second session at the veterans' club. Viktor Lodkin was initially rather reluctant to discuss the siege doubting whether two hours was enough time to discuss this topic. Nevertheless, as he listened to the testimony of Natalia Velezhova he suddenly changed his mind and gave an extended and highly detailed account of his siege experiences.

All the interviews were recorded onto cassettes and the discussions last around sixteen hours in total. A series of photographs was also taken with the author and veterans as a further means of documentation.

INTERVIEWING METHOD AND QUESTIONNAIRE

All the interviews were conducted in Russian. The method of interviewing applied during this study was adapted from a series of guidelines suggested by Gabriele Rosenthal in her book: *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*¹⁹. Rosenthal applied this method in interviews conducted with survivors of the Shoah and Nazi perpetrators of wartime atrocities. Her focus upon the structural differences between narrated life and experienced life was of particular relevance to this study²⁰. The structural gap, which exists between the two is bridged by mythopoetic processes. Vivid scenic memories which depict lifetime experiences are contrasted with interpretative statements which evaluate the meaning of these experiences.

Rosenthal encountered a number of obstacles during her group discussions. As she was interviewing Nazi perpetrators within a family setting she was dealing with what she describes as a 'threatening past'²¹. This led correspondingly to certain questions being 'blocked'²². She also noted the deployment of certain 'screen memories' used by respondents as a means of deflecting the conversation away from uncomfortable topics²³.

¹⁹ *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, edited by Gabriele Rosenthal, (London: Cassell, 1998).

²⁰ Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations*... p. 4.

²¹⁻²³ Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations*... pp. 5, 89 and 3.

Rosenthal's study also highlights the problems of interviewing respondents in the presence of relatives. These obstacles arose during the interviews with both Jewish and German families. The families had developed various means of re-interpreting the past over the years. This process created a series of 'family myths' which had appeared to replace vivid scenic memories of the past. At key points in the dialogue even when the Nazi perpetrators themselves were willing to be more frank about the past, a relative, often their wives would intervene to ensure that the topic of discussion was curtailed.

For example, in an interview with the Seewald family the grandfather briefly refers to a *Kommissarbefehl* which ordered all German units to execute captured Russian commissars on the spot. His wife is aware of his potential complicity in this crime as a former SS soldier and brings the discussion to a close. Similarly, when the grandmother in the Goldstern family begins to discuss her experiences in the Lodz ghetto her husband interjects to prevent his wife going into too much detail²⁴.

Clearly, there is a difference between interviewing veterans who were members of the allied forces and combatants from axis countries. Nevertheless, the fact that the Jewish survivors were also reluctant at times to discuss their pasts demonstrates that the existence of family myths can make interviewing within this context more problematic. Correspondingly, for the purposes of this study it was decided that it was simpler to focus upon interviewing *blokadniki* themselves as opposed to embarking upon an inter-generational study.

²⁴ Both these interviews are discussed in the chapter *Veiling and Denying*. The Seewald family on p. 292 and the Goldstern family on pp. 287-88.

It is also clear that members of younger Russian generations for obvious reasons may react against the older generation's attachment to Stalin. In this context, they may have sought to 'correct' assertions about Stalin's wartime role which would have led to a disruption of key mythopoetic processes. As ascertaining the essence of their ideological belief systems was one of the central aims of this study it was important that *blokadniki* could feel comfortable to discuss these beliefs at length.

In all cases, the respondents showed no tendency towards using 'screen memories' and only occasionally deflected certain topics directly. This was usually the topic of ideology. Nevertheless, as explored in the chapter examining patriotic siege myths this was often because they associated ideology with the image of Stalin. Once the topic of his image was raised this functioned as a portal through which they could access ideological beliefs.

Particularly instructive was Rosenthal's observation that there is a certain point in the discussion when respondents 'get caught up in the narrative current of their story and thus orient themselves less on the interviewer'. At this juncture the interviewer has also succeeded in creating a 'narrative space' within which the biographer expresses deeper latent feelings about certain events²⁵.

²⁵ Rosenthal, pp. 243-44.

This was evident in my own interviews, particularly concerning topics such as ideology and cannibalism. As mentioned above survivors interviewed within group settings can also assist one another in opening up these narrative spaces. Viktor Lodkin and Aleksandr Cherapukhin made no mention of cannibalism during their own initial testimonies. Yet, when they later listened to Natalia Velezhova's statements on this topic they felt compelled to add similar reminiscences²⁶.

At the opening of these interviews I followed Gabriele Rosenthal's emphasis on listening rather than questioning²⁷. This allows the respondent to initiate his or her own biographical self-representation in a manner of their own choosing. Almost all of the survivors expressed a desire to relate their personal experiences first before answering questions. It also took some time for them to settle into the dialogue after initially expressing that this was a difficult topic for them to discuss. Nevertheless, they embarked upon their narratives with high confidence and emotion and their initial accounts often consisted of a string of images and scenic memories which were recollected in impressive detail.

Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner have identified 'an anthropological gap' which exists between the interviewer and the respondent²⁸. In my own case this 'gap' was

²⁶ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 23.

²⁷ Paul Thomson also advocates the use of open ended questions at the beginning of an interview and states that expressing your own views early on in the interview may lead to the biographer giving you answers they think you might want to hear. Paul Thomson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 201-202.

²⁸ Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust: Critical Historical Approaches* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), p. 37.

widened by differences in age and cultural background. Correspondingly, it was important that I subtly demonstrated a knowledge of key words and phrases associated with siege life as the discussion progressed. Once the respondents were aware that I knew the meaning of these words they became more confident that the essence of their narratives was being understood.

Within the Russian context it should be remembered that during the Stalinist era contact with foreigners was not only frowned upon but could be potentially dangerous. As mentioned in the previous chapter Gelinada Grinchenko encountered considerable obstacles when interviewing former Ukrainian *Ostarbeiters*²⁹. Nevertheless, *blokadniki* are aware that the story of the siege was canonised by Soviet historiography whereas Ukrainian *Ostarbeiters* have understandably mixed feelings about their wartime contribution.

²⁹ Gelinada Grinchenko, 'Ostarbeiters of the Third Reich...'

QUESTIONNAIRE

Outlined below are the questions put before the respondents and a brief explanation of why these particular topics were chosen.

Question no. 1 – What do you remember about your life during the siege?

This question allows the respondent to speak freely and at length without being constrained by a particular theme. Rosenthal calls this part of the interview the ‘main narrative’. This also usually forms the most extended section of the interview. As Rosenthal states it is also important that the main narration is not interrupted by the interviewer who uses ‘nonverbal and paralinguistic expressions of interest and attention...’³⁰

Question no. 2 – At the beginning of the siege the Germans bombed the Badaev warehouses. This is sometimes regarded as the primary cause of the ensuing famine. What do you think about this? Is this an opinion you agree with?

During initial meetings with *blokadniki* such as Aleksandra Demidova this topic emerged as a prominent theme usually covered during the opening dialogue. It was evident that it was a story which existed within the gap between myth and history. There is also a gap between the representation of this event in historiography and personal testimonies. I subsequently sought to explore this theme in later interviews.

³⁰ Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations...* p. 3.

Question no. 3 – Did you feel a sense of patriotism during the siege? Perhaps you can also recall instances of self-sacrifice?

One of the most salient themes in siege testimony is that of communal spirit. Myths of patriotism also contain within them both global memory and local memory. They connect ‘stories of strictly local knowledge’ with ‘global and abstract’ narratives³¹.

In this instance, global memories are represented by the interpellation of heroic Soviet master narratives which are contrasted by stories of local acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. These two levels are also defined by a ‘stylised repertoire of images, motifs’ and ‘short narratives’³². Ascertaining *blokadnikis*’ attitudes to wartime patriotism was a key part of the process of understanding how mythopoetic processes function within siege testimony.

Question no. 4 – To what extent was the war against Fascism partly ideologically based?

This question was asked to determine to what extent ideology played a part in how *blokadniki* defined their wartime role. Though respondents such as Viktor Lodkin and the veterans in Kolpino agreed that their struggle was at least in part defined along

³¹⁻³² Niall Ó Ciosain, ‘Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine’, *Folklore*, 115:22 (August 2004), 222-32 (p. 225).

ideological lines the majority disagreed³³. The general view was encapsulated by Aleksandra Arkhipova's assertion that '*nado vyzhit*' - 'we had to survive'³⁴. Ideology subsequently is portrayed as secondary to the impulse to survive.

Question no. 5 – To what extent was the image of Stalin and his resilience a source of inspiration for you?

Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner regard it as vital to attempt to 'reveal the internal dynamics of the life story and to grapple with its strong mythologies and contradictions'³⁵. Stalin's image lies at the heart of these internal contradictions. Almost all the *blokadniki* who were interviewed were aware of published accounts documenting Stalinist repressions. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement collided with past experiences and feelings. The most emotive of these feelings was the recollection that, 'Of course, I cried when Stalin died'³⁶. This was reiterated on numerous occasions. Correspondingly, there is an internal tension between past lived experiences and the later reception of revelations about the Stalinist era.

Question no. 6 – The landscape of besieged Leningrad became transformed. Do you remember this strange landscape? What kind of images, sounds and smells of besieged Leningrad do you remember?

This question enables the respondents to construct scenic memories which are triggered by recollections of strong sensory based experiences. Rosenthal utilises

³³ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 8. BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV.

³⁴ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 10.

³⁵ Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust*...p. 37.

³⁶ Aleksandra Arkhipova, BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8. Interview with *Svetlana Gachina*, St. Petersburg, July 2003, BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 14.

simple phrases such as ‘What do you hear? Is it dark? Is it cold?’ The respondent can then construct various narratives emanating from ‘sense-based or body memories’³⁷. It is then possible to bridge the gap between past and present through apprehending a series of snapshots or *flashbulb* memories which present lifetime experiences in their most vivid and unadulterated form.

Question no. 7 – The story of the *road of life* is legendary. Were you evacuated and did you have any friends or relatives who also left the city?

This question is not relevant for all *blokadniki* but a significant proportion of those interviewed had been evacuated across lake Ladoga. These stories also chart the process by which Leningraders were often abruptly removed from siege life and were suddenly forced to adapt to life on the ‘mainland’³⁸.

Question no. 8 – Radio played an important role during the siege. Do you recall any wartime broadcasts or cultural events?

The continuation of cultural life during the siege subsequently became one of the key myths of patriotic defiance. A number of the respondents, including Aleksandra Arkhipova and several veterans in Kolpino also took part in concerts arranged in hospitals to raise the morale of injured troops. Ol’ga Rozanova, through her acquaintance with local musicians had a direct connection to the premiere of Shostakovitch’s ‘Leningrad’ symphony³⁹.

³⁷ Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations...* p. 3.

³⁸ Greater Russia is often referred to by *blokadniki* as the mainland (*bol’shaia zemlia*) as St. Petersburg was constructed upon a group of small islands.

³⁹ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11.

Question no. 9 - There is the official history of the siege and then personal stories and recollections. Could you perhaps tell me a little about this? For example, are there any interesting stories or rumours which you remember from that time?

One of the most notable aspects of personal stories is their interaction with or rejection of master narratives propagated by governments, professional historians or other voices of authority. This question was presented with the intention of ascertaining whether survivors were aware of this process. In every instance it was met with complete comprehension. Veterans were also adamant that it was their personal experiences which defined the essential characteristics of siege life. Nevertheless, this was presented not as an attempt to directly de-mythologise Soviet grand narratives but rather as an opportunity to supplement official historiographies with personal recollections.

Question no. 10 – Could you tell me about wider attitudes towards your generation today? Do you feel your wartime activities receive enough broader recognition?

This question also connects with the theme of ideology. It highlights the gap between past and present and generational differences. Almost all of the respondents felt that their generation possessed special qualities of resilience and mutual respect for

one another. This was contrasted with a general view that younger generations could not truly comprehend their wartime experiences. Yet, despite the recent controversies surrounding *monetizatsiia* and the proposal to replace various benefits with cash payments, these veterans generally felt both appreciated and well treated by the present administration⁴⁰.

Following the recitation of the main narrative these questions seek to 'initiate more detailed stories or narration of themes of biographical events' to build up an intricate picture of siege experiences⁴¹. Through touching upon themes of patriotism, the Badaev warehouses and the *road of life* the wider mythology of the siege can be explored through personal stories and interpretations.

The question regarding memory of 'interesting stories or rumours' triggered recollections of cannibalism, local acts of criminality and rumours of foreign spies infiltrating the city. Consequently, though they were not asked directly about these topics, these discussions emerged naturally after a narrative space had been opened up. Rosenthal in outlining her method of inquiry counsels against confrontation⁴². Asking survivors more directly about these topics could potentially

⁴⁰ The retired workers from the *Elektrosila* plant expressed their gratitude for recent rises in their pensions. Aleksandra Arkhipova reiterated a common theme. She felt that the fact that Vladimir Putin was born in St. Petersburg inherently gave him a deeper understanding and respect for siege veterans. See also the chapter, 'Pod Znakom "monetizatsii"'. Interview with Aleksandra Arkhipova, BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 11. BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 15.

⁴¹ Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations...* p. 3.

⁴² Rosenthal states that more confrontational lines of questioning lead to argumentation rather than narration. She suggests supplementing words such as 'why' or 'what for?' with phrases such as 'Perhaps you could tell us something more about...' Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations...* p. 3.

be counterproductive as they may be interpreted as reflecting a desire on the part of the interviewer to de-mythologise or undermine the inherent sacrality of siege narrative.

In summary, the selection of these particular questions is a consequence of preliminary conversations with siege survivors. As the main narrations demonstrate key aspects of how siege memories are evaluated and re-presented they also enabled the interviewer to take this further by exploring recurrent mythopoetic processes in more detail. The wider observation that siege narrative is inherently sacred narrative because these stories are considered sacred by those that tell them emerged as a natural response to earlier discussions. The questionnaire provided a framework for further analysis and these findings were then compared with a much broader cross section of siege testimonies.

Jan Vansina describes such reminiscences as ‘didactic tales’⁴³. Consequently, mythopoetic processes apparent within siege testimony should not be disregarded because of their non-factual content. For the respondents they are primarily a means of mapping the past. The questionnaire was devised as a means of ascertaining how this process is played out and of identifying the ‘palimpsest of layers’ contained within personal siege mythologies⁴⁴.

⁴³ Jan Vansina, *Oral tradition: A study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) p. 157.

⁴⁴ Helen Buss states that, ‘A mapping of autobiography recognizes both the palimpsest of layers in human subjects and the erosion of those layers...’ Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves...*p. 10.

MAPPING THE SELF: THREE OPENING ACCOUNTS

This is a brief analysis of three opening accounts provided by Antonina Arkhipova, Sergei Goncharenko and Svetlana Gachina. The object of this analysis is to identify briefly the ‘palimpsest of layers’ contained within siege testimony and to examine initial traces of mythopoetic processes. Autobiography is a discourse of identity and these opening passages also demonstrate how *blokadniki* begin the journey of mapping the self as they attempt to recount their experiences.

Antonina Arkhipova began her testimony with the following statement: ‘The first winter, well, the blockade began on 8 September... this winter was the most terrible. This first winter was absolutely the worst. Practically no one was studying or working. People were simply trying to survive because of the hunger. Anyone who was able would help other people. We all helped one another. All we could do was to try and survive and make it through this first winter and to help one another so that we did not die’⁴⁵.

Patrick J. Geary has written that ‘All memory, whether ‘individual’, ‘collective’, or ‘historical’, is memory *for* something’. In addition, respondents are engaging in a process of selective amnesia whereby they pick out certain memoranda from ‘a spectrum of *memorabilia*’⁴⁶. This memoranda consists of what they deem worth remembering. Essentially, they structure their belief-systems around ‘symbols, rules, concepts and the relationships among them’ taken from semantic or atemporal memory⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p 1.

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), pp. 9 and 20.

This type of memory is distinct from episodic memory which focuses upon 'dated episodes and events'⁴⁸.

This brief statement by Arkhipova is an example of semantic memory. The only date she mentions is 8 September. Yet, this date is preceded and followed by the word 'winter'. Her later statements provide us with a wider spectrum of memorabilia from which she has selected only a few key, symbolic elements in her opening statement. She goes on to describe her activities within a brigade of teenage girls sent out onto the streets to apprehend any suspicious looking individuals. She also recounts her trip to the grounds of the Badaev warehouses following the bombing on 8 September and then describes her duties upon rooftops where she and fellow classmates poured sand over unexploded incendiary bombs.

Clearly, Arkhipova was very active during the opening month of the siege yet in her initial statement she asserts that 'Practically no one was studying or working'.

In this regard the date of 8 September is secondary to her primary objective; that being to capture the essence of siege life within a few opening sentences.

The selected memoranda initially rejects the wider spectrum of memorabilia which includes all her activities and military duties during those first weeks of the siege.

She steps over this theme to emphasise inactivity. In this regard, she goes straight to the darkest months of the siege, those being December 1941 and January 1942.

⁴⁸ Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance...*p. 20.

In reality, it was during those months that the city ground to a halt and that people largely ceased to be active.

In this opening passage the word winter appears four times. Correspondingly, when Arkhipova first thinks of the siege it immediately signifies winter. Ol'ga Rozanova, the Goncharenkos and various others also stress that this first winter for them, is really what the siege represents.

The word 'help' appears twice and is followed by the word 'helped'. These are conjoined with the words 'surviving', 'survive' and 'one another'. This is the first trace of mythopoetic impulses. Already, memory is being used 'for something'. 'Survival/help/one another' conjoin to form the first impression of the 'imagined' community as a unified entity. Consequently, one of the key themes of siege mythology, that of a closely knit mutually reliant community, is already emerging from the outset of this testimony.

Paul John Eakin identifies three features of autobiography, those being 'I-narrative, self-experience, and identity narrative'⁴⁹. Within this context a fourth feature should be added, that being 'we-narrative'. Arkhipova's statement is 'I-narrative' in the sense that she speaks with one voice, but in her opening account she backgrounds self-experience in favour of stressing the word 'we'. The words 'We helped one

⁴⁹ Paul John Eakin, 'What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography?', *Narrative*, 12: 2 (May 2004), 121-132 (p. 129).

another' constitute a key sentiment expressed in all the interviews. It is a pivotal statement and a powerful motivator for myth production.

Consequently, Arkhipova constructs her own identity only in relation to others. Self-experience is only relevant in reference to the wider community. The siege itself is represented by a memoranda consisting of key words such as winter, help, one another, survival and hunger. With this selective itinerary of symbols Arkhipova expresses the essence of what the siege signifies for her.

Sergei Goncharenko provides a quite different opening account. 'I was conscripted into the Baltic Fleet and it was in the Baltic fleet that I completed my military training in Kronstadt. I was then sent on my ship to Lipaja in Latvia⁵⁰...this was a cruel winter and the temperature plummeted to minus forty degrees...then the war with Finland finished...and then later on 22 June we were despatched to the Finnish gulf as part of a military training exercise.

Already, suddenly on 21 June the sound of anti-aircraft fire could be heard in the distance. Then we discovered that because of the presence on our ship of a German intelligence agent we were not equipped with enough shells for our anti-aircraft guns and had to return to be rearmed. We were sent to intercept a fleet of German vessels anchored in the region of Helsinki. At 3.45 in the morning our ship suddenly burst into flames. There were heavy casualties and fatalities. Finally, another ship from

⁵⁰ See also 'Between Myth and History: Siege historiography', pp. 32-33.

our squadron (*eskadra*) picked us up and we sailed east to Tallinn... From then on we returned to the front around Leningrad'⁵¹.

Goncharenko's statement was unique among the opening accounts given during the interviews. He did not try to portray the essence of siege life as Arkhipova, Velezhova and others did, but provided a preamble consisting of his activities during the lead up to the siege. In this way, he prepared the ground for his subsequent testimony.

The first paragraph selects a memoranda of 'military training, winter', and 'war'.

The second focuses upon the words 'intelligence agent, 3.45' and 'casualties and fatalities'. Arkhipova's statement was primarily atemporal in that only one specific date, that being 8 September was mentioned. Goncharenko is more specific mentioning the dates of 21 and 22 of June (1941) and the time of 3.45 am.

This is a notable example of a scenic memory which depicts that first moment when trauma is experienced. For others, such as Svetlana Gachina it was the experience of witnessing their first air raid⁵². It marks 'the threshold of the present'. Past and present are disjointed as the young Goncharenko witnesses the consequences of a sudden attack upon his ship.

⁵¹ BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, transcript, p.7.

⁵² BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side A, transcript, p. 1.

Judith Greenberg has written that 'The listening to and/or reading of traumatic narratives should involve a recognition of the structure of fragmentation'⁵³.

Certainly, Arkhipova's narrative is fragmented in that it is not governed by any distinct chronological order. Greenberg also states that 'Trauma is wedded to the issue of survival'⁵⁴. This is certainly the case in both these opening narratives as Arkhipova stresses a sense of communal co-dependency upon 'survival' while Goncharenko recalls being rescued by the arrival of another Soviet vessel.

As a survivor of this first attack he also experienced an initial 'threat to the body. However, while the body recovers...the impact upon the mind lingers'⁵⁵. Linda Belau has written that 'Perhaps the most mysterious and the most devastating dimension of trauma is its apparent power to confound ordinary forms of understanding'⁵⁶.

Yet, this does not mean that survivors themselves do not seek to explain their traumatic experiences. For Goncharenko, the existence of a German spy upon his ship becomes the reason for the attack while for Arkhipova her survival was dependent upon community spirit. It is in these initial evaluative statements that the mythopoetic urge first becomes evident. Goncharenko provides no further evidence of the existence of this spy but his assertions about the activities of foreign saboteurs were echoed by Arkhipova, Gachina, Velezhova and others.

⁵³⁻⁵⁴ Judith Greenberg, 'The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo', *American Imago*, 55:3 (Autumn 1998), 319-347 (pp. 324 and 325).

⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶ Linda Belau, 'Trauma and the Material Signifier', *Postmodern Culture*, 11:2 (January 2001) 1-46 (p.1).

Greenberg's emphasis upon a 'structure of fragmentation' which characterises siege testimony is certainly true in the case of Arkhipova's testimony. Nevertheless, Goncharenko places his recollection of the traumatic destruction of his ship within the context of a cogent and chronologically structured account of the lead up to the siege. The time of '3.45' stands out because of its precision. At some point during the attack Goncharenko must have glanced at a clock or at his watch and this time subsequently lingers in the memory. Therefore, within his selective memoranda '3.45' has a potent signification.

In recounting their first traumatic wartime experience Goncharenko, Gachina and others are delineating territories which separate past and present. They are marking boundaries between unexceptional and exceptional experience. As Greenberg states, as witnesses to exceptional experience they subsequently become 'ambassadors of an exceptional realm, bearers of a higher (albeit more terrible) knowledge than is available to the rest of us'⁵⁷. This knowledge becomes the kernel from which mythopoetic production begins as survivors attempt to bring trauma within the limits of representation.

The final statement is provided by Svetlana Gachina who lives in the same flat today where her family have been resident for over a century. 'Many, very many young people and girls volunteered straight away for the army. Of those from the conservatory (Gachina was at that time a second year student at the music conservatory) who volunteered for the army almost all of them died at the front...well, 9

⁵⁷ Linda Belau, 'Trauma and the Material Signifier', (p. 1).

September for us this is the beginning of the blockade, not the 8th...That's when we got to know about the blockade...Suddenly the air raids began for the first time...It was these terrifying little bombs. It was so unexpected. You would go out on the street and suddenly there would be an attack. Now, if we went along Nevskii Prospekt you would see these signs stating that 'this side of the street during raids was more dangerous than the other side'⁵⁸.

As stated earlier, recollections often consist of both 'global memory and local memory'. They connect 'stories of strictly local knowledge' with 'global and abstract' narratives. Niall Ó Ciosain writes that 'Local memory ...consists of stories of strictly local knowledge or interest and often features named individuals'⁵⁹. Arkhipova's statement is an example of a kind of global memory as she does not mention any specific location but attempts rather to view the entirety of the siege from above.

Gachina on the other hand, connects her narrative from the outset with a specific location, that being the music conservatory. She later recalls her instrumentation tutor who died during the siege. In this regard, she is following Ciosain's model by constructing a story containing 'local knowledge or interest' which 'features named individuals'.

Interestingly, she was the only respondent who asserted that the siege in reality began on 9 September and not on the 8th. She separates historical accounts from her

⁵⁸ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Niall Ó Ciosain, 'Approaching a folklore archive...', (p. 225).

own experience. Historians may state that the siege began on 8 September but in her view the siege only started ‘when we began to know’ about it. Again, this statement places her recollection within the frame of local rather than global memory.

Gachina then recalls witnessing her first air raids. Her statement that it was ‘so unexpected’ reflects a key feature of traumatic experience. She is marking a boundary between the unexceptional and the exceptional by stressing the sudden unpredictability of daily life. Finally, she mentions the blue signs on Nevskii Prospekt which have subsequently become a central part of siege iconography. At this moment, through the interdigitation between personal experience and siege iconography she creates a link between her own memories and wider siege mythology.

Finally, she mentions that many of her fellow students volunteered for active service and never returned. Almost exactly the same statement was made by Natalia Velezhova who recalled that her classmates ‘Did not know how to shoot a rifle. They all died’⁶⁰. Consequently, Gachina touches upon the theme of death and loss, which ultimately underpins most siege narratives.

Linda Belau describes the analysis of trauma as an ‘ethic of the impossible’⁶¹. It is the inherent tension between the incomprehensibility of traumatic experience and the desire to bring it within the realms of representation which creates a

⁶⁰ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 25.

⁶¹ Linda Belau, ‘Trauma and the Material Signifier’ (p. 2).

need for mythopoetic discourse. Belau also states that traumatic memories can never be entirely 'worked through, and filed safely away'⁶². Consequently, mythopoetic narrative becomes a necessary means of explaining experiences which continue to 'linger in the mind' and is a vital component in the process of 'mapping the self'.

CONCLUSION

Although the thirty respondents who were interviewed presented their memories of the siege differently there are certain recurrent tendencies which gradually became apparent. The myth of the 'imagined' community as unified and defiant continues to be very resilient. While Aleksandra Arkhipova, Natalia Velezhova and Ol'ga Rozanova recounted tales of cannibalism at great length they also emphasised that these were the activities of a corrupt minority⁶³. Arkhipova's statement that 'We helped one another' underlines this sentiment.

In addition, there is an itinerary of symbols which dot the landscape of almost every siege testimony. These emotive signifiers from the tiny *burzhuika* stove to the blue signs recalled by Svetlana Gachina form a network of stoppages which give these autobiographical maps mutually shared points of reference. Nevertheless, the

⁶² Linda Belau, 'Trauma and the Material Signifier' (p. 18).

⁶³ Arkhipova also remarked that 'Well, our generation...it was a special time. We lived through the blockade...there are younger people who just do not care about very much...either capitalism or socialism...but cynicism is everywhere, not only in our country'. BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, pp. 11-12.

manner in which these signifiers is ordered changes from testimony to testimony and the dominant themes can be notably different.

For example, the Kolpino veterans dwelt upon their wartime activities, the loss of family and friends, shelling and patriotism while Viktor Lodkin and Aleksandr Cherapukhin recalled the activities of enemy agents, the Badaev warehouse bombing and life in the bomb shelter. On the other hand, all these narratives still utilised similar 'sense-making systems' which depict the unique landscape of wartime Leningrad and the myths of everyday life enacted within it⁶⁴.

In summary, these survivors did not regard cannibalism and acts of criminality as separate from daily life. These were activities that most if not all Leningraders were aware of. They were regarded rather as simply another part of that exceptional realm which Leningraders found themselves a part of. Through confronting these horrors Leningraders became 'bearers of a higher (albeit more terrible) knowledge than is available to the rest of us'. Correspondingly, stories which concentrate on the underbelly of the wartime community merely serve to deepen that sense of ambivalence which lies at the heart of all sacred narrative. They bring together both the sacred and the profane while the overarching message remains the same. As Aleksandra Arkhipova succinctly stated, 'It was terrible of course. But we all pulled ourselves together...you would cook something and try to get a little to eat...yes, despite the whole awfulness of it all many of us pulled through'⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ Stuart Blackburn, 'Life Histories as Narrative Strategy: Prophecy, Song, and Truth-Telling in Tamil Tales and Legends', p. 204.

⁶⁵ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 14.

BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY: SIEGE TESTIMONY AS 'HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION'

The following chapter examines some of the key operative themes discussed in a selection of over two hundred testimonies published recently in the Russian press.

These are compared with statements made by around one hundred and fifty *blokadniki* in Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin's *Blokadnaia Kniga* (Book of the Blockade)¹. Though these testimonies were collected in the 1980's *Blokadnaia Kniga* was republished in 2003 containing two supplementary chapters with information which was originally censored.

Blokadnaia Kniga was the first attempt made by Russian authors to present siege accounts which focussed upon 'myths of everyday life' as opposed to approved master narratives reflecting Soviet ideology². In this regard, *Blokadnaia Kniga* functions as a useful midway point for the analysis of siege testimony between Soviet historiography and contemporary statements by survivors. All the respondents who were interviewed for this study expressed great admiration for the work of Adamovich and Granin. Consequently, *Blokadnaia Kniga* is clearly perceived by veterans to be an accurate portrayal of their experiences. Daniil Granin, who lived through the siege himself was also able to draw upon personal recollections.

The study of published testimonies was conducted with a view to providing the interviews with a wider context. It was also necessary to examine whether

¹ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga* (St. Petersburg: *Nezavisimoe Izdatel'stvo "PIK"*, 2003).

² See also Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1994).

observations about mythopoetic processes present in the recorded interviews were mirrored by statements made by other *blokadniki*. As demonstrated below this is clearly the case. Nevertheless, while ideology was discussed in detail with the respondents this topic is almost entirely absent in recent published testimonies. *Blokadnaia Kniga* initiated this shift and it is a trend which appears to have continued up to the present day.

Essentially, whether in the conducted interviews or in published testimonies siege stories appear to inhabit the gap between myth and history. The following chapter attempts to explore that gap and to examine where published siege narratives and the testimonies collected for this study overlap. First of all it is necessary to find a theoretical approach which accurately describes the essential characteristics of contemporary siege narrative. Giving testimony about traumatic experiences is a complex and often difficult undertaking. Therefore, it is necessary to examine certain interpretative tendencies with a view to shedding light on the earlier interviews.

Siege testimonies are representations of reality. Yet, *blokadniki* have also read many representations of siege life in the Russian media, both during and following the Soviet era. Consequently, it is important to bear in mind that they may have been

influenced by Soviet mythologies and that at times their own stories might blur the distinction between Soviet historiography and personal testimony.

In the chapter focussing upon patriotic myths the example of Aleksandra Demidova is cited. She presented a collection of newspaper clippings collected over several decades which she felt would aid the author in gaining more knowledge about the blockade. She did not regard Soviet presentations of siege life as being contradictory to her own statements. On the other hand, her recollection of a mutilated body lying at her local tram stop would not have passed Soviet censors³. Correspondingly, these stories escape crude categorisations focussing upon factual evidence as opposed to personal interpretation. They constantly merge the two together and as such demand a flexible theoretical approach.

SIEGE TESTIMONY AS 'HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION'

Eileen Williams-Wanquet identifies 'historiographic metafiction' as characterising a worldwide trend in contemporary fiction. These metafictions 'Far from denying the real' reintroduce 'truth and reference' and make problematic 'the entire notion of representing reality'. She goes on to state that 'If the order of things is an effect of mythical discourse, then a new discourse can remodel one's vision of reality'. Williams-Wanquet also draws our attention to the New Historicists assertion that

³ This meeting took place in St. Petersburg in November 2001.

‘actuality is episodic chaos, that there is no universal history or exhaustive narrative, and that the order of things is a product of discourse’⁴.

Blokadnikis’ testimonies are discursive inscriptions on the historical past. They fail to delineate historical facts from lived experience and popular myths because they portray history as text, as discourse and not simply as data and documentation. In addition, by fusing realism and imagination they make representations of reality problematic. In fact, they ‘remodel our vision of reality’.

For example, one myth examined below concerns a train filled with smoky coloured cats which apparently entered St. Petersburg during the Spring of 1942. The cats were said to have been sent from the district of Iaroslavl as ratcatchers and became ‘guards’ protecting food warehouses⁵. Natalia Velezhova, Aleksandr Cherapukhin and Viktor Lodkin dismissed this story as ‘not plausible’⁶. Nevertheless, a significant minority of other survivors recall this event and two statues have recently been erected in St. Petersburg as a memorial to these feline patriots. Russian historians though, have been understandably reluctant to give this story any credence due to the absence of empirical evidence⁷.

M. Charlene Ball has written that ‘Literature draws upon myth to imply authority, resonance, importance, significance. Although myth can be used to re-inscribe

⁴ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, ‘Marina Warner’s Indigo...’ (pp.267-68). See also Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁵ Elena Rotkevich, ‘Bronze Monument to a Cat: Cats helped save people’s lives in besieged Leningrad’.

⁶ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 24.

⁷ See below on p. 21.

notions of 'human nature' gender roles, or class distinctions, it can also lend itself to subversion and resistance, for truths can be written under the guise of mythic fantasy that cannot always be told in a realistic mode'⁸. Myth, lays claim to truth-telling in a different manner from historical documentation. It gives 'expression to our common experiences' and demonstrates how 'the role of narrative' enables 'us to undergo, shape and survive those experiences'⁹.

The myth of the cat story is comforting for survivors because it is a myth of man and animal coming together to fight a common enemy. Nature and humans join forces to fight the 'unnatural' ideology of Fascism. It is also resistant to realist and historical interpretations because the story only exists in the minds of those who remember it.

The analysis of these discursive inscriptions demands an open methodological approach. Steven J. Friesen proposes the following theoretical framework¹⁰. Firstly, 'myths are narratives; they are shared by an identifiable group ...and the story lines are not new'. At some point myths such as that of the cat train or that of green rockets launched by spies and Nazi collaborators became lodged in the consciousness of certain survivors (see below). Once this process reaches completion such stories

⁸⁻⁹ M. Charlene Ball, 'Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction/Tracing Arachne's Web', *Myth and Feminist Fiction*, 16: 2 (Summer 2004), 229-33 (p. 229).

¹⁰ Steven J. Friesen, 'Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123:2 (Summer 2004), 281-313 (pp. 281-282).

become remarkably resilient. Daniil Granin is sceptical about the existence of green rockets¹¹. Yet, Velezhova, Lodkin and Cherapukhin were adamant that this activity took place. They base their statements upon personal recollections and as such are dismissive of any suggestion that these stories could simply be rumours¹².

As Friesen states, 'myths can be distinguished from other stories because they have a special priority for a group of people'. The priority behind the green rocket story was heightened vigilance. Velezhova stated that 'Spies were everywhere'. The proximity of enemy troops did arguably demand that Leningraders be aware of the possibility of enemy infiltration. Natalia Rudina recalled hearing Nazi propaganda being broadcast to the citizens of Kolpino¹³. Nevertheless, it remains unclear as to whether the green rocket story is simply the consequence of a successful interpellation of Soviet propaganda or whether it is based upon fact. What is evident is that this myth had a clear function. It was used as a means of combating complacency.

The published testimonies examined below and the interviews conducted during this project demonstrate that certain stories become stabilised over the passage of time. Friesen describes the abstract story line as a 'mythic pattern'. He goes on to assert that, 'myths are deployed in particular historical and social settings. A mythic pattern is flexible and is never narrated the same way twice. Sometimes

¹¹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 299-300.

¹² BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 22.

¹³ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 14.

the narrations of the same story line can even contradict each other. This implies that myths are not static and timeless...'¹⁴ Of course, no two accounts of the kinds of stories cited above are identical. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable consistency between prominent siege myths such as that surrounding the bombing of the Badaev warehouses. In this case, the mythic pattern itself is entirely stable while it is the surface content of these narratives which is flexible. Therefore, there are some limitations to Friesen's analysis even if his theoretical framework is a useful one.

Friesen's approach, on the other hand is highly perceptive in identifying the interplay between different features of mythopoetic narrative. He states that personal mythologies are essentially discursive systems involving 'triadic co-definition ... in which a social group, a set of ritual performances, and a set of mythic narratives produce one another'¹⁵. It is clear that in stories such as that of the green rockets this interplay occurs for a reason. While we may regard this story (as Daniil Granin does) as implausible we can also understand its importance to this particular social group.

'Historiographical metafiction' is also a natural product of this triadic interaction. These stories are not fictional but they do combine both historical and imaginative elements as demonstrated in the story about the cats. Friesen, while emphasising the fluidity of the mythic pattern overlooks the importance of repetition. Small

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Steven J. Friesen, 'Myth and Symbolic Resistance...' (pp. 281-82).

repetitive acts which were enacted during those initial weeks and months of the siege were essential for survival. As Aleksandra Arkhipova stated ‘You just had to keep moving’¹⁶. In turn, these repetitive acts were gradually replaced by the stories which depict them. In this regard these narratives ‘bridge one spatiotemporal context to another’ thereby giving ‘renewed significance’ to time tested cultural narratives¹⁷.

RECENT SIEGE TESTIMONIES

The conclusions of this chapter are based upon observations arising from the analysis of testimonies collected by Adamovich and Granin and of a wide selection of accounts published in Russian newspapers and journals as well as in transcripts of television and radio broadcasts. They have also been given by a diverse demographic group of elderly Russians. Among the respondents are artists, musicians, writers, teachers, doctors and medical staff, military personnel, war propagandists, priests, party officials and functionaries, housewives, mechanics, machinists and various other people who worked in industry and manufacture. The age of the respondents ranges from *blokadniki* who are currently in their seventies to those who are in their mid nineties.

The list also includes a substantial number of Jewish veterans many of whose testimonies have been published by the *Agenstvo Evreivskikh Novostei* and by the

¹⁶ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 5.

¹⁷ Shara McCallum, ‘Eavan Boland’s gift: sex, history, and myth’, *Antioch Review*, 62:1 (Winter 2004), 37-43 (p. 37).

Israeli internet newspaper <www.megapolis.org>¹⁸. In addition, there are the recollections of Leningraders who now live in various other cities scattered across the former Soviet Union.

In most cases they are either directly involved in the organisation of local *blokadnik* societies, or are regular participants in commemorative events and social gatherings¹⁹. The importance of ritual and commemoration is continually stressed as a means of coming together and remembering shared experiences. This echoes Stephen J. Friesen's assertion of triadic co-definition which results from the ongoing process of participation in social gatherings and rituals.

The focus is placed primarily upon very recent accounts which are contemporary with my own interviews. The bulk of the testimonies (around two hundred and twenty) cover the period leading from the 60th anniversary of the ending of the siege on 27 January 2004 up to and beyond the commemorative celebrations held in May 2005 to mark the anniversary of Victory in Europe or VE Day. During recent months there has been a veritable outpouring of debates, interviews and media polls in Russia charting almost every aspect of memory of the Great Patriotic War.

The question of whether there has been a general decay in standards of morality and a decreasing sense of national identity and social cohesion since the fall of

¹⁸ *Agenstvo Evreivskikh Novostei*, published at <www.aen.ru>. 'Leningradskie Blokadniki', Megapolis Org c. 1996-2002 (Israeli Internet Newspaper) <www.megapolis.org/aliya/indb.html> 20 July 2003 [accessed 28/06/2005].

¹⁹ The voluntary society called *Blokadnik* based in Novosibirsk for example has around eleven hundred members. It supports *blokadniki* with moral, social, legal and if needed medical assistance. It was formed by former veterans in 1990. <www.cip.nsk.su/win/block/block.htm> [accessed 25/08/2005].

Communism is a recurrent theme. This touches upon one of the most seemingly contradictory features of siege narrative, that of feelings of nostalgia for an era of acute suffering. For example, on the 60th anniversary of the breaking of the siege the St. Petersburg Times asked a wide group of younger people what significance the blockade had for them²⁰. Their answers were surprisingly passionate for a younger generation whom veterans often criticise for being supposedly more westernised, computer literate and materialistic than their forbears²¹.

Natalia Kosichenko who is 28 and an art critic stated: 'The siege is history. The siege is our memory. It's our pain'. Nikolai (his surname was not printed) is unemployed and is 41. 'If people today faced such a siege, the city would surrender because today the main force is dollars and euros and not the pure ideals that the war generation lived by'. Nikolai also expressed a sense of a loss of national pride and patriotism since the fall of the Soviet Union hinting an underlying sense of nostalgia for the past.

Marina who was also 41 at the time of the poll and is a teacher said, 'We should remember the siege because we should be proud of our families and our city, and our history'. She also stated that the siege was also the history of her family.

²⁰ Irina Titova, 'City marks breaking of brutal Siege', *The St. Petersburg Times*, Issue 938 (6), 27 January 2004 <www.sptimes.ru> [accessed 14 /11/2006]. The section 'Vox Populi' regularly polls St. Peterburgers on a wide range of opinions.

²¹ The veteran Viktor Kirshin stated that 'The shared hardship made people very close to each other...'. If in the morning a neighbor didn't come to the shared kitchen, his neighbors would go to his room, make him get up, give him tea and share bread. And by evening that person would have been revived'. Irina Titova, 'They felt the hunger pangs, but survived the cruel siege', *St. Petersburg Times*, Issue 938 (6), 27 January 2004 <www.sptimes.ru> [accessed 14 /11/2006].

Nineteen year old student Dima felt that ‘those people were heroic, and that we should remember that’ while twenty year old student Pavel Smirnov regretted that ‘we don’t have such patriots anymore’. He also felt that people were no longer so attached to a sense of place, and that without this awareness of a rooted identity, they would not be able to access feelings of patriotism which engender a spirit of defiance in any community whose existence is placed under threat.

Correspondingly, this small sample of views appears to reflect a lack of confidence among younger people that they would be able to defend their city were it ever to be faced with such a challenge again.

As stated in the chapter examining myths of patriotism the respondents interviewed for this project were adamant that they belonged to a special and unique generation.

Pavel Smirnov’s statement was echoed by Iurii Semeonovich who asserted that 9 May Victory Day commemorations are the only events which retain resonance for all Russians²². Tat’iana Letenkova lamented the disappearance of what she clearly regarded as the essential character of Leningrad’s former citizens. Like Aleksandra Arkhipova she felt that the essence of old St. Petersburg, as exemplified by its earlier cultural intelligentsia could never be recaptured²³. It is notable, that even a twenty year old student could be influenced by such a penchant for nostalgia.

Occasionally, the Russian media have published hitherto unknown diaries and accounts of *blokadniki* from the generation born in the 1880’s through to the 1910’s. By including a select number of such recollections it is possible to gain a brief insight into the attitudes

²² BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 14.

²³ Tat’iana Letenkova simply stated: ‘Leningraders were different then’. BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 11. BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 15.

and belief-systems of the parents and grandparents of *blokadniki* still alive today. These accounts are particularly valuable as they sometimes contradict assumptions made by living survivors. For example, the topic of religious faith and church attendance during the siege clearly divides different generations.

A number of the survivors interviewed, including Aleksandra Arkhipova, asserted that while they had a vague recollection of some older relatives returning to the church for solace during the siege, faith in general had little resonance for them²⁴. Nevertheless, there are extraordinary accounts of packed church congregations and passionate declarations of religious faith in a significant number of other siege testimonies.

In the case of Jewish survivors the maintenance of religious rites and traditions was valued as a means of re-affirming their sense of identity. This was underlined by Isaak Kaganovskii who stated the importance of maintaining a sense of Jewish family life and traditions²⁵. Liudmila Iablonskaia recalled a meeting with a local priest following which she asserted that spiritual nourishment from God replaced her gnawing hunger pains²⁶. Valerii Lianin gives an extraordinary account of church life during the siege. A member of the congregation of the *Kniaz' - Vladimirskii Sobor* he recalled that over three million rubles was raised for a military fund after a vast array of treasures

²⁴ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 11.

²⁵ Anna Baskakova interviewed Isaak Borisovich Kaganovskii for the *Agenstvo Evreivskikh Novostei*, article entitled, '*Ia Vernul'sia k Bogu*' ('I returned to God'), Moscow, 28 November 2004 <www.aen.ru> [accessed 06/11/2005].

²⁶ Liudmila Iablonskaia, '*Blokadnaia Devochka*', '*Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine*', 23 August 2005 <www.world-war.ru> [accessed 17/10/ 2005].

and valuables had been donated by parishioners²⁷. During a time when valuables rather than hard currency were more likely to procure food at the local market this was an act of considerable sacrifice.

In contrast to the memories of previous generations are the testimonies of *blokadniki* who were young children during the 900 days. The unpublished diary of Igor' Liapin consists predominantly of simple patriotic texts and drawings which are contrasted by entries which focus upon his own personal concerns²⁸. The testimonies of Elena Vishnevskaja and Igor' Suvorov express a sense of overwhelming curiosity at the strange new world of siege life²⁹. These narratives comprise mainly of short *flashbulb* memories which depict the siege as seen through the eyes of young children.

Children could also express their feelings about siege life through drawings. Marianilla Maksimovna Kol'tsova, a doctor in the hospital at *Vasilievskii Ostrov* was a pioneer of art therapy. She asked the children in her ward, who were almost all critically ill with advanced dystrophy to draw and chronicle what they witnessed around them³⁰.

²⁷ Valerii Lianin, 'U Nkh Ostavalas' Tol'ko Nadezhda', 'Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine' <www.world-war.ru> [accessed 17/10/2005].

²⁸ Igor' Liapin, Siege of Leningrad Diary, unpublished, copy in possession of the author.

²⁹ Suvorov, transcript, p. 3, March 2006, Newcastle. BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 6.

³⁰ Andrei Petrov, 'Blokadnyi Vrach Spasala Detei Risovaniem', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 5 May 2004 <spb.kp.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

The results are a series of paintings and sketches by seventeen children with simple and expressive captions such as 'Me and Lidiia in the bomb shelter' and 'This is our watch. It tells us when we can eat the next little piece of bread'. The most evocative piece is arguably 'The Black Square' drawn by a nine year old boy simply referred to as Vladik. Suffering from chronic dystrophy, depression and indifferent to his surroundings, Vladik's black square is an expression of utter hopelessness and despair. Faced by the sheer incomprehensibility of a world turned upside down, Vladik expressed his confusion through abstraction.

Margaret R. Higonnet observes that children's memories of moments of high stress take 'sensory and iconic forms...perceptions may be intense yet fragmentary' and may be accompanied by flashbacks 'which intrude into the present'³¹. Elena Vishnevskaja recalls that strange sensation of a German plane flying low overhead³². She was struck by the strangeness of being so close to this alien object. Her colleague at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology T. A Shrader was also a young child at the time. A short piece entitled 'At Night a Bomb Fell on our House' describes her memories of the siege. 'In September 1941 a bomb fell. In my memory I can recall some incomprehensible horror and the taste of slaked lime in my mouth'³³.

³¹ Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Time Out: Trauma and Play in *Johnny Tremain* and *Alan and Naomi*', *Children's Literature*, 33 (2005) 150-170, (p. 152).

³² BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 2.

³³ T. A Shrader, 'Noch'iu v Nash Dom Popala Bomba', 'Iz Istorii Kunstkamery', 1941-45, (*Kunstkamera*, Sankt Peterburg, 2003), p. 315.

Shrader's recollection of the taste of lime in her mouth echoes Higonnet's observation that childhood memories of trauma, 'take sensory and iconic forms'. War brought with it experiences which for children were beyond comprehension. Igor' Liapin charted his experiences with memorable prose.

'We did not know there was going to be a war,
 We did not know how well we lived,
 We did not know what cold was,
 We did not know what hunger was,
 We never knew such things back then'.
 26 February 1943 (unpaginated).

Clearly, in this case the interpretive or evaluative aspects of these testimonies are less prominent. Vishnevskaja and Suvorov viewed their memories with a certain detachment. Yet, these vignettes are instructive in that they demonstrate that siege memory in its most fragmented and unelaborated form becomes almost solely a memory of the senses.

They are not historiographic metafiction because in these instances only the *flashbulb* memories themselves are presented. Nevertheless, they express the 'simplicity of essences' which defines siege life³⁴. The incomprehension of T.A Shrader was shared by many adults. Vladik's intense black scribbles are also

³⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973), p. 156.

an entirely appropriate expression of this confusion. The memories of Igor' Liapin reflect the source of all siege mythologies through expressing that collision between a peaceful previous life and a new world 'made strange'³⁵.

Interestingly, these hyper realistic accounts of siege experiences find their closest parallel in some of the contemporary literature of the time. Olga Berggol'ts *Fevralskii Dnevnik* (February Diary) and Vera Inber's poem *Tramvai Idet na Front* (The Tram goes to the Front) chronicle siege life in a simple and faithful manner³⁶. Ol'ga Rozanova stressed that the simplicity of Berggol'ts' poetry gave it an aura of authenticity which remains highly valued by survivors.

Williams-Wanquet observes that 'History is critically reevaluated in the light of the present, by fictionally revisiting its textualised remains'³⁷. Yet, history can also be reevaluated through revisiting non-textualised remains. Clearly, the act of transcribing oral testimony transforms verbal statements into text. Nevertheless, the statements themselves demonstrate how history itself can be remodeled by the memories of those who participated in its creation.

Williams-Wanquet goes on to assert that postmodernism, 'questions how we can know the past and rethinks history as a human construct'³⁸. Bearing testimony is an

³⁵ The concept of *ostranenie* or *estrangement* was defined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his article, 'Form and Material in Art', pamphlet, 1923, *Cultural Memory*, no.2, online edition <<http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no2/shklovsky.html>> [accessed 14/11/2006].

³⁶ See also Vera Inber, 'Stikhi, Rossiia Moia, Bibleotechka Russkou Sovetskou Poesii v Piatidesiati Knizhkakh', (Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1967) and B. Kornilov, 'Stikhotvorenniia i poemy', (Leningrad, 1957).

³⁷⁻³⁸ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo...' (pp. 267-68).

act which mirrors this process. Whether these testimonies recall the experiences of children or adults they remain a blend of self-reflexivity and historical elements. They also contain a number of salient themes which are a product of narrative positioning. The possible reasons behind this process of selection as well as some of the key operative themes themselves are explored below.

FOOTBALL, AND THE RUSSIAN CAT AS PATRIOT

These two topics were not covered during the interviews conducted for this study but they are notable as further examples of historiographic metafiction. Here, 'fantasy, myth and archetype' conjoin as a means of defining the identity of the 'imagined' community³⁹. Roland Barthes wrote that 'The mythical signified...is the concept that is behind the myth; it is the myth's motivation'⁴⁰. In this instance it is the mythical signified which is of most importance. The key question is to ascertain what motivates these stories and other similar siege myths in order to explain recurrent interpretive processes in both published and unpublished memoirs of the 900 days.

Sarah H.S Graham in her discussion of H.D's (Hilda Doolittle) poetry written during the London Blitz quotes the lines, 'we are alive within the walls of our bodies, for the time being...' ⁴¹ H.D wrote these lines following the experience of surviving her first air raid. Graham describes this experience as akin to a spiritual resurrection

³⁹ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo...' (pp. 267-68).

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Jonathan Cape (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 121.

⁴¹ Sarah H.S Graham, "We have a Secret. We are Alive": H.D's *Trilogy* as a Response to War', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 44.2 (2002), 161-210 (p. 165).

which transforms, 'myth into reality'. Graham also cites H.D.'s defiant statement that 'We have a secret. We are alive'⁴². The mythical signified of cats defending Leningrad and of people playing football matches encapsulates a similar spirit of defiance.

Stories of football matches which took place during the siege have recently been published in the newspaper *Nevskoe Vremia* and in an article by Jane Millington. *Nevskoe Vremia* printed a piece charting the history of a match played between factory workers from the *Stalin* metallurgical factory and members of Leningrad's football team *Zenit*. A great deal of energy was apparently expended in locating and bringing together the players and *Nevskoe Vremia* states that the match went ahead and was played on 31 May 1942⁴³.

Jane Millington wrote that the city leadership arranged football matches in order to keep 'as much of the normal life of the city going as possible'⁴⁴. Again, this appears to echo H.D.'s defiant statement that 'We have a secret. We are alive'. A. Bubnov recalls a commemorative match played by members of the 4th regiment on 9 May 1972 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of a similar match which took place during the siege⁴⁵.

This is not the only example of sport being used as a source of patriotic fervour during the siege. Tatiana Chertkova who trained as a gymnast during the darkest days of the blockade recalled that they were given double rations and fed buckwheat *kasha* and milk.

⁴² The quote is taken from H.D., *Within the Walls* (Iowa City: The Windhover Press, 1993), p. 2

⁴³ Mikhail Grigor'ev, 'Football na Linii Ognia, *Nevskoe Vremia*', 2 March 2005, *Zhurnalnyi Zal*, <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005]. All *zhurnalnyi zal* articles quoted are unpaginated.

⁴⁴ Jane Millington, 'Keeping Alive the Memories of Leningrad's Sorrow'. *St. Petersburg Press Culture and Lifestyle*, (date not provided), published at <it.stlawu.edu/~rkreuzer> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁴⁵ A. Bubnov, 'Davniaia Vstrecha s Veterami', 'Neva', 2004, no.1, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

Chertkova was part of a local government project to train Leningrad's gymnasts for a huge meeting which took place in Moscow. She does not mention a specific date for the meeting but asserts that somehow before the siege was lifted a group of young gymnasts was escorted out of Leningrad and on their arrival in Moscow were greeted as heroes by the other competitors⁴⁶.

The myth of the cat train comes close to Williams-Wanquet's definition of 'magic realism'⁴⁷. Politics collides with fantasy as a binary opposition between Russians and their cats versus the Nazi forces and vermin. The newspaper Pravda recently printed an article entitled 'Cats helped save people's lives in besieged Leningrad'. It was stated that in 1942 Leningrad had become 'flooded with rats'. Even trams were forced to stop as 'big colonies' of vermin crossed the road. Zoia Kornilievna recalls that 'In spring of 1942 my sister and me were going to the kitchen garden planted in the stadium in Levashevskaya street. All of a sudden, we saw a grey mass approaching us. Rats! When we reached the kitchen garden, all its vegetables had already been gobbled up by rodents'⁴⁸.

Cats had disappeared during the early months of the siege as Leningraders were compelled to eat their pets in an effort to survive. By the time the threat of famine had receded they had become a valuable commodity. Kira Loginova wrote in her diary that in April 1943 the Chairman of Leningrad City Council issued a decree ordered in the Yaroslavl district which brought to 'Leningrad four train cars of

⁴⁶ Tatiana Chertkova, 'Zhenshchiny Plakali Gliadia Na Nas', <Izvestia.ru>, 27 January 2004, [accessed 07/06/2005].

⁴⁷ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo...' (pp. 267-68).

⁴⁸ Elena Rotkevich, 'Bronze Monument to a Cat...'

smoke-colored cats. To receive a cat one had to stand in a long line. Cats were in extremely high demand and people were ready to give away the most valuable thing they had – bread – in exchange for cats'. Kornilievna stated that 'I was giving a part of my bread allowance to the woman whose cat had kittens'⁴⁹.

The art teacher Aleksandr Miliukov stated that a statue erected in memory of these feline patriots would remind young Leningraders that 'You wouldn't have been born if this cat hadn't saved your great-grandmother's life by protecting the bread supplies from rats'⁵⁰. Pravda confirms though that 'Historians still argue about whether the story of cats in the besieged city is true or not'. The historian Andrei Dzeniskevich doubted whether this story was plausible. 'I heard this story. It resembles a legend, although it could be true. However, no proof of this fact has been found'⁵¹.

Nevertheless other *blokadniki* such as Svetlana Egorova, in an interview on Radio Svoboda asserted that 'In the spring of 1943 four carriages arrived from the district of Iaroslavl filled with smoky-coloured cats'⁵².

Again, it is the mythical signified or 'the concept behind the myth' which is of most relevance. In terms of religious symbolism the rat has been traditionally associated with betrayal, decay and evil. It could also symbolise the role of *diversanty* or

⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ Elena Rotkevich, 'Bronze Monument to a Cat...'

⁵² Svetlana Egorova, 'Gost' I Studii', *Radio Svoboda* <www.svoboda.org> 3 June 2004 [accessed 02/06/2005].

saboteurs who Natalia Velezhova and Aleksandr Cherapukin maintained were ‘everywhere’⁵³. Rats and *diversanty* threatened the cohesion of the ‘imagined’ community through spreading disease and committing acts of subversion⁵⁴.

Nadezhda Rozanova Riabinina asserted to Daniil Granin that ‘saboteurs with tracker dogs gave the Germans signals with green rockets’⁵⁵. This echoes Natalia Velezhova’s assertion that a local hospital had been bombed after its location was revealed by saboteurs⁵⁶. Nevertheless, Granin cautions his readers that ‘Stories of people signaling with rockets, were rumours typical of those days... On many occasions, however, when we tried to check on details, it turned out that the incident was not confirmed’⁵⁷. By acknowledging that these were ‘rumours typical of these days’ he is also underlining the fact that siege conditions motivated myth production.

Despite Granin’s scepticism it is also important to understand what motivates these myths and similar stories unsubstantiated by documentary evidence. As Timothy J. Brown states ‘The actual truth or falsity of the narrative is irrelevant. What is

⁵³ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p 22.

⁵⁴ The Nazis themselves deployed rat symbolism in their characterisation of the Jews as vermin. For a detailed discussion of rat symbolism refer to, Carl Freedman, ‘Towards a Marxist urban sublime: reading China Miéville’s King Rat’, *Extrapolation*, 44:4 (Winter 2003), pp. 395-408

⁵⁵⁻⁵⁷ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 299-300.

important is whether the ideas presented in the narrative are accepted and believed to be true'⁵⁸. While Velezhova and others dismissed the plausibility of the cat story it is clearly held to be true by many survivors. In these cases, it is used by certain *blokadniki* as another means of demonstrating the ingenuity and adaptability of the 'imagined' community.

The fact that neither the cat myth or stories of *diversanty* firing off green rockets are believed by all *blokadniki* also demonstrates the inherent polyvocality of contemporary siege testimony. The tendency of Soviet historiography to subsume various voices into a 'single and univocal' heroic narrative has been gradually superseded by multi-vocality⁵⁹. As Bryan Rennie states, 'Voice and viewpoint in histories are multiple, and so the practice of history as discourse ought to be reflexive'⁶⁰. *Blokadniki*, whether consciously or unconsciously are engaged in this process of reflexivity and in doing so 'challenge the normal historical paradigm of an ultimately single authorial viewpoint'⁶¹.

Rennie regards the ultimate goal of this postmodern approach to historiography as a critique which demythologises and deconstructs that which ultimately 'goes into history as text'⁶². Yet, it is difficult see how history as testimony would play a part of this process. Siege testimonies certainly bring other voices into the discussion

⁵⁸ Timothy J. Brown, 'Deconstructing the Dialectical Tensions in The Horse Whisperer: How Myths Represent Competing Cultural Values', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 38. 2 (November 2004), 274-95 (p. 274).

⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰ Bryan Rennie, 'Religion after Religion, History after History: Postmodern Historiography and the Study of Religions', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 15:1 (2003), 68-99 (pp. 91-92).

⁶¹⁻⁶² Bryan Rennie, 'Religion after Religion...' pp. 91-92.

alongside the univocality of Soviet historiography, but tales of cat trains and of green rockets hardly demythologise accounts of the blockade.

What they do demonstrate though, as Rennie also suggests, is a move away from meta-narratives towards a 'resurgence of particular local narratives as myths in the self-consciousness of their limited and constructed nature'⁶³. Daniil Granin states that these stories were 'typical of those days'. Extraordinary events appeared at times to demand extraordinary explanations. Yet, a return to normal life in peacetime did not lead to the disappearance of such narratives. Soviet historiography itself is now merely one strand of the blockade story, a single voice in the polyvocality of siege discourse.

THE QUESTION OF MEMORY

In the passages examining oral history and the veracity of long term memory it was asserted that a wide amount of research conducted in the fields of oral history and experimental psychology supports the veritability of long-term memory because certain lifetime events can be remembered in remarkable detail and exhibit a surprisingly low level of decay⁶⁴. The resilience of these memories was demonstrated through reference to testimonies made by other Second World War veterans and Holocaust survivors. The data collected from the various interviews and the additional three hundred and fifty testimonies strongly supports these findings.

⁶³ Bryan Rennie, 'Religion after Religion...' pp. 91-92.

⁶⁴ Refer also to Martin A. Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction*, Open University Press (Buckingham: Milton Keynes, 1990), pp. 76 and 87.

Structurally, siege narratives are characterised by a remarkably similar composition which is defined by a series of specific points on a memory grid. These particular points demarcate and freeze frame the narrative into a series of almost photographic stills. In terms of the fluidity of the narrative these frozen images may not be placed in any particular order or given any kind of introduction. This is a method of narrative construction based upon a block structure rather than a sense of organic development.

Ol'ga Rozanova's' recollections are a typical example of this kind of narrative construction. She began by remembering a specific date, that of 8 September 1941; the day the Germans first started bombing. Then she recalled the destruction of the Badaevskii warehouses which took place during that same night. She proceeded to talk more generally about aspects of the siege; the cold, hunger and the absence of electricity and the city coming to a gradual halt. Then she discussed the difference between men and women's attitudes during the blockade. Suddenly, she hopped forward to the end of 1942 when she recalled that at last her mother, who had been critically ill up to then, was strong enough to work. Then back to September 1942 when she related an incident where she collected inedible beetroots from the fields and back again to 13 January 1942, the date her father died. This new topic sparked a fresh line of memories about his burial and a sense of relief that his body was interred in a marked grave, as opposed to in a communal burial site. Finally, she remembered the cannibalism and a mutilated corpse lying at the opening of the cemetery⁶⁵.

⁶⁵ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, pp. 1-4.

These blocks of thematic material contain within them precise scenes and lucid depictions of certain experiences. Nevertheless, the structural intent is clearly not founded on a preference for chronological order. There is no overall smooth organic development but a presentation of an inventory of symbols and interpretations. Correspondingly, the biographer's mental journey is akin to a stroll through an art exhibition where each visual image represents a memory trace and experience which cannot be erased.

In essence, Rozanova's story and the recollections of other *blokadniki* do not have a uniform beginning, middle and end. The re-presentation of freeze framed memories of certain experiences also does not always need additional commentary because such vivid stills of human experience are rich in symbolism and significance. The ultimate expression of this hyper realism, as stated above are the memories of survivors who were young children at the time.

Daniil Granin, in referring to deeply ingrained sensory memories describes them as wiping 'out the boundaries of time'⁶⁶. Certain tastes and smells are powerful triggers for siege memories. This is particularly true in the case of Leningraders as they were constantly preoccupied with the task of procuring food during the siege. Iraida Vasilievna Starikova recalled a passionate fondness for jelly made from joiner's glue which quickly faded as it became the main course of their meagre diet. She asserted that it was a smell she could not stand right up to the present day⁶⁷. V. Stupin cannot

⁶⁶ The first edition of *Blokadnaia Kniga* was also translated into English. *The Book of the Blockade*, Raduga Publishers (Moscow, 1983), p. 234.

⁶⁷ Iraida Vasilievna Starikova, 'Kofe' iz Sladkou Zemli', *Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine* <www.world-war.ru>, 28 March 2005 [accessed 08/11/2005].

endure the smell of pine resin because it was given to the populace amid fears of an outbreak of scurvy while Ol'ga Ivanovna Smirnova can never forget the tastiness of pancakes made from potato peelings⁶⁸.

Iurii Rabinerzon, like Elena Vishnevskaja is haunted by visions of enemy aircraft. He recalls in particular the night of 4 November 1941 when a German Heinkel 111 was shot down. The Heinkel looked like 'a fish dangling on a hook' as it was caught up on the lines of spiralling lights emanating from anti-aircraft projectors⁶⁹. Igor', (his surname is not mentioned), a four year old patient in Marianilla Kostrova's ward drew a painting of a similar event entitled 'Our plane rushes towards the German and destroys him'⁷⁰. The shooting down of the Heinkel 111 is also recalled by Gennadii Kap'tsev who states that this sight gave onlookers a sense of solace and hope⁷¹.

Other *flashbulb* memories are singled out because they recall scenes or experiences which typify how life and daily routines were 'made strange' during the siege.

E. Foniakova recalls sitting indoors in her ski suit and sweater while the temperature was -30 outside. The room was almost pitch black save for dancing shadows on the

⁶⁸ V. Stupin, 'V Dvoim Kol'tse', *Neva*, no.1, 2004, *Zhurnalnyi Zal*, <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005]. Anna Maiskaia, 'Nas spasli Mamina Zelion', *Nevskoe Vremia* <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru>, 29 January 2004 [accessed 04/06/2005].

⁶⁹ Iurii Rabinerzon, 'Nochnou Taran', *Neva*, no.9, 2003, *Zhurnalnyi Zal*, <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

⁷⁰ Andrei Petrov, 'Blokadnyi Vrach...'

⁷¹ Gennadii Kap'tsev, 'V Strashnuiu Godinu', no.11, *Neva*, 2002, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

ceiling which emanated from the tiny light of the *koptilka*⁷². Anna Borisovna Chemena remembers a cup filled with water on the sitting room table⁷³. She watched as the water froze before her eyes while Sofia Mikhailovna (surname name not given) caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror one day. Her hair had gone completely grey although she was only 20 years old at the time⁷⁴. Luidmila Iosifovna Iampol'skaia was saved from serious injury when her doll, aptly called the Snow Maiden (*Snegurochka*) took the brunt of a piece of shrapnel which flew into her bed⁷⁵. She recalled that her doll lay with her legs blown off having thus undergone the same agony that befell so many Leningraders caught by falling incendiaries.

The fate of Iampol'skaia's doll is clearly highly symbolic. These and other persistent scenic memories are described by Evgeniia Ravdel as akin to 'standing beside an open grave'⁷⁶. Daniil Granin wrote that 'The blockade had made Leningrad unrecognisable, so everything struck me and was firmly imprinted on my memory'⁷⁷.

⁷² E. Foniakova, 'Utro', *Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine*, 17 October 2005 <www.world-war.ru>, [accessed 08/06/2005].

⁷³ Alla Borisovna Chemena, 'Vrach Blokadnogo Leningrada', *Fontanka* internet magazine, 1 March 2005, <www.fontanka.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁷⁴ Aleksei Elkin, 'Nikto luchshe Soni Khazanovou ne sumeet oblechit' bol...', interview with Sofia Mikhailovna Druz' (date of interview not provided), *Agenstvo Evreivskikh Novostei* <www.aen.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁷⁵ Anna Kostrova, 'Kuk'li Spasli Zhizn Blokadnym Detiam', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* (St. Petersburg), 24 January 2004, <www.spb.kp.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁷⁶ Inga Petkevich, 'Svobodnoe Padenie', *Novyi Mir*, no.6, 1994, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 09/06/2005].

⁷⁷ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 399.

Perhaps the most striking statement of this kind was made by the scientist Raisa Sinitsina who asserted that 'The siege lives inside me like a sickness. I cannot get rid of the awful memories...' For her that open grave brought back one particular recollection. It was the day that a colleague arrived at work and was plagued by the thought that he was sorely tempted to eat his wife's corpse which lay at home. She states that 'Such things you don't forget'⁷⁸.

The holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo states that survivors of traumatic experiences are 'two-fold beings' containing within themselves both ordinary and 'deep-lying memory'⁷⁹. These deep-lying memories preserve sensations and physical imprints. Thus, Rozanova's beetroots, Chemena's frozen cup and Iampol'skaia's wounded doll are all imprinted on their memories. They are single instants which encapsulate the 'simplicity of essences' which defines siege life.

GUARDIAN ANGELS

In his analysis of Giorgio Agamben's book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Andrew Norris states that Agamben is concerned with defining the 'logic of sacrifice'. Sacrifice is 'revealed in the life that is sacred'⁸⁰. The concepts of sacrifice (*sacrificio*) and of sacred life (*sacra*) are interlinked. Davide Panagia in his critique of Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* questions his interpretation of bare life (*nuda vita*) as 'left bare of any semantic content'. He asserts that 'the term refers to life in

⁷⁸ Raisa Sinitsina, 'The Red Army Women Celebrate Victory', 8 May 2005 <www.haaretz.com>, [accessed 6/6/2005]

⁷⁹ Charlotte Delbo, *Days and Memory*, transl. R. Lamont (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001), pp. 46-7.

⁸⁰ Andrew Norris, 'Giorgio Agamben and the Politics of the Living Dead', *Diacritics*, 30: 4 (Winter 2000), 38-58 (p. 47).

its pure nakedness where what we are asked to imagine is the materiality of a naked body left standing, but in a state of extreme desperation'. This definition appears to encapsulate both the physical and mental condition of Leningraders during late 1941. The *homo sacer* has confronted the 'very real experience of life, death and the zone of indistinction wherein this experience lies'⁸¹.

Stories of guardian angels and altruistic acts fuse together the *sacra* and the *sacrificio*. The city's populace as a whole existed within that 'zone of indistinction' so eloquently described by Panagia. Amos Goldberg states that, 'writing a narrative during the Holocaust was writing a life narrative—not only in the sense that the narrative depicts the writer's life but also in the more literal sense that it actually enables life'⁸².

Through creating narratives of guardian angels who saved lives through acts of kindness Leningraders were also enabling life through asserting that the spirit of the community was inviolable. The survivors who were interviewed regarded these stories as an essential part of how they imagined their wartime community.

Arkhipova and Rozanova's families had received gifts from passing soldiers, while several of the Kolpino veterans were themselves acting as guardian angels by helping those stranded in their homes or injured after shelling⁸³.

Goldberg goes on to state that 'Trauma therefore remains situated within the framework of the complex dialectics of life and death'. Trauma is the 'actual

⁸¹ Davide Panagia, 'The Sacredness of Life and Death: Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and the Tasks of Political Thinking', *Theory & Event*, 3:1(1999), published in one page form at <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v003/3.1r_panagia.html> [accessed 14/11/2006].

⁸² Amos Goldberg, 'Trauma, Narrative, and Two Forms of Death', *Literature and Medicine*, 25:1 (Spring 2006), 122-141 (p. 137).

⁸³ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8. Natalia Velezhova stated that 'First of all, *all* the children were on duty protecting buildings'. BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 24.

condition of the possibility of reality – as a symbolic universe- to exist’⁸⁴. Thus, through experiencing a very real sense of that ‘zone of indistinction’ between life and death *blokadniki* create a very distinct symbolic universe. The myth of the guardian angel in bringing together both *sacrificio* and *sacra* remains a key element in how this universe is characterised.

The stories themselves recall the kindness of strangers and the receipt of gifts, food parcels or assistance in the street. In addition, a significant number of survivors experienced a critical moment when they came perilously close to death only to be rescued by a passing stranger. They stumble or lose their footing on the treacherously icy pavements and are acutely aware that failure to stand up again may prove fatal. At that moment, a stranger appears, helps them to their feet, leads them safely home, and then promptly disappears. As discussed below, in some cases they will spend the remainder of their lives pondering over whether this stranger, who is vividly recollected in their memory will ever appear again. In this sense, they are memories which are unresolved as veterans still seek to find closure through thanking these people for their kindness.

Svetlana Pronberg relates an incident when two neighbours arrived at the door. They were too fond of their dog to kill it so gave it to the Pronberg family for food. ‘That dog saved us’, she said⁸⁵. Anastasia Mutovkina collapsed with exhaustion on a bench on the journey back from burying her father. She recalls being helped to her feet and led home by a kindly stranger⁸⁶. Aleksandra

⁸⁴ Amos Goldberg, ‘Trauma, Narrative...’ (p. 137).

⁸⁵ Irina Titova, ‘City marks breaking of brutal siege’.

⁸⁶ Anastasia Mikhailovna Mutovkina, ‘*Otblest Vechnogo Ognia*’, no.9, *Neva*, 2004, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

Pukhova was given bread by a passing soldier, in this case she discovered his identity and later married him⁸⁷. Soldiers and sailors also often took stranded children under their wings. Aleksandr Matveivich Neverov, whose family had perished was saved in the street by sailors from the destroyer Kirov⁸⁸. Vladimir Andreev recalls a boy called Zhen'ka who disappeared for some time and suddenly reappeared as a 'son of the fleet' after sailors had rescued him⁸⁹. Alevtina Nikolaevna Volkova recalls being given a whole sack of millet by a passing soldier, an incident which continues to arouse feelings of intense gratitude⁹⁰.

Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin discuss this theme in their chapter: *U kazhdovo byl svoi spasitel'* (Everyone had their saviour)⁹¹. They relate the story of Nil' Nikolaevich Beliaev who collapsed in the street and was led home by a kindly lady, herself very weak, safely back to his flat⁹². Mariia Mikhailovna Ershova was on the point of death when a soldier arrived at the door with a parcel of pony meat while Evdokiia Nikolaevna Glebova was saved by two young girls who carried her home one day after she collapsed on the Anichkov bridge⁹³.

⁸⁷ Irina Titova, 'City marks breaking of brutal siege'.

⁸⁸ Liudmila Demidova, 'Delo ego Zhizni', *Nevskoe Vremia*, 29 August, 2002, <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> [accessed 04/06/2005].

⁸⁹ German Popov, 'Shkol'naia Letopis' *Blokadnykh Dnei*, *Nevskoe Vremia*, 2 March 2005 <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> [accessed 04/06/2005].

⁹⁰ Natal'ia Vereshchak, 'Treugolniki s fronta greli golodnou zimou', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, (St. Petersburg) <www.spb.kp.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁹¹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 155.

⁹²⁻⁹³ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 465 and *The Book of the Blockade*, p. 428.

Of the more recent testimonies two particular incidents stand out. Galina Glukhova was led gently home by a soldier after she collapsed when trying to collect water. She regrets to this day that she did not learn his name. She continues to attend parades and commemorations in the hope that some day she will recognise him in the crowds⁹⁴.

Valentina Glebovna Stankevich remembers the day which was supposedly going to be her last. It was New Year 1942 and the temperature she maintains was as low as -35. Her mother announced that 'We will probably die today'. Valentina then went out to scavenge for scraps of firewood. On her return she caught sight of something on the windowsill. She approached the object to discover that it was a packet of oatcakes. Someone had entered the flat and left this priceless gift. She continues to smile on New Year's day and even met her future husband on the anniversary of this event⁹⁵.

In some cases, such as the Kolpino veterans, the strangers are themselves the biographers. L. A. Mandrykina met a boy sitting beneath a gate. He stated that he had no remaining family and had come there simply to die. She took him under her wing and fed him joiner's glue and warm water. He exclaimed with joy that 'I am going to eat this glue forever!'⁹⁶. There are also of course many stories of acquaintances who were generous and selfless but the tales of unknown saviours are particularly prone to mythic interpretations. The oatcakes 'appear' from nowhere, an outstretched hand reaches

⁹⁴ Galina Glukhova, *Kazhdyi Den' Mog Stat' Poslednim...*, *Soiuz Zhurnalistov*, 27 January 2004 <domjur@snpi.org.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

⁹⁵ Galina Nikolaeva, 'Shto podarit' tebe rodnaia?', *Nevskoe Vremia*, 22 November 2001 <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> [accessed 04/06/2005].

⁹⁶ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 76-77.

forward to you in the street after you have fallen down, and as you reach the point of despair a knock comes at the door and a soldier is standing there with a food parcel.

Certain veterans still feel compelled to try and find these guardian angels in an effort to thank them. Galina Glukhova visited numerous parades and commemorations over the years. Each time she glanced across the lines of veterans in hope of recognising the person who saved her.

Clearly, such stories are not unique during times of crisis and war. A notable example is the myth of the Angels of Mons. During the battle of Mons in August 1914 British forces were in danger of being overwhelmed by enemy advances. Soldiers later reported that they had witnessed angels hovering above the battlefield and asserted that they had saved the British forces from destruction. David Clarke writes that these rumours persisted long after the Armistice of 1918 and that during the war they led to claims by both French and Russian forces of similar sightings⁹⁷. Clarke states that the Mons story circulated at a time when the war had entered a new bleak phase of trench warfare and unrelenting suffering⁹⁸. He also regards it as part of a plethora of wartime rumours and myths 'that were directed towards perceived external aggressors'⁹⁹.

On finding the oatcakes on the windowsill Valentina Glebovna is comforted by the thought that some invisible force is looking after her. The Angels of Mons and other

⁹⁷ David Clarke, 'Rumours of angels: a legend of the First World War', *Folklore*, October 2002, 151-73 (p. 151).

⁹⁸ David Clarke, 'Rumours of angels...' (p. 167).

⁹⁹ David Clarke, 'Rumours of angels...' (p. 151).

World War one myths were also products of a time of fear and uncertainty.

Again, they emerge as a result of a confrontation between the 'very real experience of life, death and the zone of indistinction wherein this experience lies'.

DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION

This realm of indistinction was defined during the siege by the constant proximity of death. Surviving this experience was akin to a rite of passage. Northrop Frye identifies this process as beginning with '*agon* or conflict' which is followed in turn by '*pathos* or death struggle' and concludes with *anagnorisis* or discovery of 'the recognition of the hero...' ¹⁰⁰. Consequently, the *homo sacer*, having undergone considerable sacrifices apprehends the meaning of sacred life through being confronted by its fragility.

This rite of passage is often accompanied by a psychological journey which begins with the individual being terrified of death and ends with them treating it with casual indifference. For example, a number of the survivors who were interviewed mentioned that while there was panic during the initial air raids in the Autumn of 1941 this sense of alarm soon faded.

Aleksandra Arkhipova recalls that at the beginning of the siege people ran to the bomb shelters but after some weeks they stood motionless on the streets or huddled together at home calmly accepting whatever fate awaited them ¹⁰¹. This is echoed by published

¹⁰⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, p. 187.

¹⁰¹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8.

accounts such as that provided by Ol'ga Smirnova. Smirnova remembers how her father read her fairy tales during raids in order to distract her from the terrifying whining of incendiaries outside. She was kept at home by parents who stated that 'If we die, we die together'¹⁰². In reality, nowhere felt entirely safe during air raids and as such Leningraders left their fate to chance and good fortune¹⁰³.

Death also brings with it a sense of absence. Liudmila Kozhevnikova, similar to Svetlana Gachina and Natalia Velezhova describes the death of an entire class of schoolmates while Viktor Zalgaller portrays the chaos he witnessed following his arrival at the front¹⁰⁴. After heavy shelling a deranged auxiliary runs past screaming 'Everyone is missing' while a bewildered Zallgaller stands amid corpses and a soldier's intestines wrapped around the branches of a nearby tree.

Mikhail Andreivich Pavlov's account is fairly typical of these stories. He was involved in a disastrous attempt to cross the Neva and join up with other divisions at Nevskii Piatachok during the Autumn of 1941. 70% of his division were lost as his comrades, outnumbered, outgunned and hopelessly exposed were mowed down by German machine guns¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰² Anna Maiskaia, 'Nas spasli Mamina Zelion'.

¹⁰³ 'Leningradskie Blokadniki', Megapolis Org c. 1996-2002, 20 July 2003 <www.megapolis.org/aliya/indb.html> [accessed 28/06/2005]. Indifference to bombing was also a feature of life during the London Blitz. Sara Wasson writes that 'Anecdotes abound of laconic cockney responses to bombing'. *Using a Shattered City: Fantasies of Wartime London, 1939-51*, Phd Thesis, University of Cornell, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Liudmila Kozhevnikova, 'Zavtra Bylo Voina', *Gazeta Peterburgskii Soiuz Zhurnalistov*, no. 2, April-May 2005. Viktor Zalgaller, 'Tak nachinalas' voina; tak voina zakonchivalas', *Neva*, 2005, no.1, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

¹⁰⁵ Liudmila Frantsuzova, 'I zdes' prokhodila granitsa', *Vsevoliuzhskie Vesti*, 90(1026), 24 November 2004.

Death soon encroached upon life back in the city. Faina Blagodarova asked her sister Marina why she liked to sit on the windowsill and count the corpses awaiting collection outside. Her simply answer was 'I do it for history'. But one day a man, while dragging another corpse on a sled collapsed and died in the street. Marina felt drawn to his 'huge staring eyes' but checked herself as she was confronted by 'the deep unsolvable mystery of death'¹⁰⁶. Viktor Kirshin recalls mountains of corpses growing daily on the banks at Karpovka, a sight which is 'still in front of my eyes'¹⁰⁷.

To confront the 'deep, unsolvable mystery of death' and to adjust to the psychological consequences of such an experience was a challenge faced by almost everyone.

Aleksei Vinokurov remembered watching a man eating his soup in a canteen. After finishing the soup he was about to eat his kasha when he slumped on the table and died¹⁰⁸. Andrei Vasilievskii recalled how people carried their documents at all times just in case they did not make it home¹⁰⁹.

Aleksandr Lodkin also mentions an occasion when he glanced at a lady on the street only to realise moments later that she had passed away¹¹⁰. Apollon Davidson

¹⁰⁶ Faina Blagodarova, 'Blokada, Oktiabr'', no.12, 2001, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

¹⁰⁷ Irina Titova, *They felt the hunger pangs...*

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Nikitin, 'Pamiat' – *Neizvestnaia Blokada*, *Soiuz Zhurnalistov*, no.1, January/February 2003 <domjur@snpi.org.ru> [accessed 09/06/2005].

¹⁰⁹ Anna Vasilievskaja, *Kniga o Zhizni*, 'Novyi Mir', no.2, 2003, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

¹¹⁰ Aleksandr Lodkin, 'Blokadnoe Pis'mo', *Zvezda*, no.5, 2003, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

remembered collecting water from the Fontanka canal unperturbed by two corpses which lay there, while Anastasia Mutovkina noticed two limbs bobbing in the water while she lowered her bucket through an ice-hole on the Neva¹¹¹.

Mass graves and the sight of deep trenches being excavated in cemeteries are a common theme. Elizavet Turnas' participated in burial duties. She describes thousands of corpses in mounds at the cemetery, the blowing up of holes and then the dumping of bodies by diggers into pits¹¹². Galina Grigor'evna Bobinskaia stated that the cemeteries had become so congested with cadavers that the police issued an order prohibiting individuals from bringing bodies for burial without obtaining prior permission. Subsequently, corpses were left 'in courtyards, in lofts and on stairs'¹¹³.

Mariia Ivanovna Dmitrieva describes finding a lady with half her head blown off with her children on her knee – one dead and one baby still alive¹¹⁴. Nina Zakharova was, like Dmitrieva one of the *druzhniki* who were sent out across the city to discover who remained alive in the various blocks and flats which had often fallen silent during the apogee of the famine. She mentions the occasions when children were discovered living with dead relatives¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ Vladimir Tol'ts, 'Tsena Pobedy', 'Istoriia i Sovremennost: Leningrad, Oktiabr' 1941', *Radio Svoboda*, 24 October 2004 <www.svoboda.org> [accessed 08/11/2005]. Anastasia Mikhailovna Mutovkina, 'Otblek Vechnogo Ognia'.

¹¹² Mikhail Kuraev, *Svediteli Neizbezhnogo, Blokada kak Khudozhestvennaia Realnost'*, *Znamia*, no.12, 2001, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

¹¹³ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 148.

¹¹⁴ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 206.

¹¹⁵ Nina Aleksandrovna Zakharova, 'Vo imia budushchego', *Nevskoe Vremia*, 24 January 2001 <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> [accessed 04/06/2005].

Stories provided by veterans in Kolpino depicting the loss of almost their entire families are given added credence by numerous similar accounts¹¹⁶. Maksim Vasiliev dragged the corpses of first his mother, then his brother to the cemetery and lived out the remaining winter months alone in the family flat¹¹⁷. Tatiana Mikheeva watched her parents die and was forced to live alone in their flat for an entire month barely able to survive the bitter cold and hunger, while Gennadii Kap'tsev's father's body lay on the table for six days¹¹⁸.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing accounts is given by Rosa Vrublenskaia. She lived in a communal flat where 25 people had once dwelt. One by one the voices emanating from the various rooms off the central corridor faded away. Her entire family perished and she remembers being petrified and alone. She recalls naked corpses by the kitchen, eerie silence and the front door slamming open and shut in the wind¹¹⁹.

The slamming door in Vrublenskaia's account is again symbolic of that deep sense of absence. Death, as a recurrent theme brings together the narratives provided in the recorded interviews and published accounts. It is also a topic which was consciously backgrounded in Soviet historiography. Harrison Salisbury

¹¹⁶ This was the case with Viktor Oleinikov who found it very painful to relate his memories. BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, pp. 10-15.

¹¹⁷ Iuriia Kantor, '*Na vsiu Ostavshuiusia Zhizn' Nam Khvatit Gorechi I Slavy, 60 Let Nazad byla sniata Blokada Leningrada*', *Nauka Izvestiia*, 26 January 2004 <www.inauka.ru> [accessed 08/11/2005].

¹¹⁸ Iuriia Kantor, '*Na vsiu Ostavshuiusia Zhizn' ... Gennadii Kap'tsev, 'V Strashnuiu Godinu*'.

¹¹⁹ Viktoriia Ivantsova, '*Odnovremenno Geroi I Avtory*', *Nevskoe Vremia*, 5 February 2004 <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> [accessed 04/06/2005].

asserts that the leadership, including Andrei Zhdanov and Stalin himself feared political repercussions and questions that might subsequently be asked if the true extent of the tragedy came to light after the war. Salisbury estimates that at least 1,100,000 Leningraders perished which is almost 500,000 more than the official Soviet estimate of 632,253¹²⁰. Aleksandra Arkhipova agreed with Salisbury's estimate and it is clear that both in published and unpublished accounts the topic of fatalities is considered to be of prime importance¹²¹.

This continued emphasis upon providing detailed accounts of deaths both in the city and at the front is a direct challenge to master narratives propagated by Soviet historiography. The broad brushstrokes of the 'hero city' and of Socialist ideology are replaced by survivors' accounts of directly witnessing the extent of mortalities. In this regard assertions about the extent of fatalities function as counter-memory, and as a 'subversive rereading of historical narratives'¹²².

CONCLUSION

The overall picture presented in the Russian media today of siege narratives appears to chart a process whereby certain themes are coming more into focus. Though there have been articles which have recently appeared discussing the topic of cannibalism they refer to the recent release of NKVD documents

¹²⁰ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*, pp. 516-17.

¹²¹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 6.

¹²² Stephen Legg, 'Memory and Nostalgia' (p. 105).

rather than actual testimonies¹²³. Cannibalism, similar to ideology appears to be largely absent from current debates.

In this case though, it is arguably no longer a reflection of censorship but a consequence of the content of the narratives themselves. Viktoriia Voloshina examined this culture of siege nostalgia in her article: '*Blokadniki* remember the good things while remain silent about the bad'¹²⁴. She identified a 'protective memory mechanism' which prevented unpleasant memories from rising to the surface. She had witnessed *blokadniki* weep during commemorations but while they wept spoke of subjects which deflected people away from the source of their grief. Despite the cannibalism she stated that survivors remained proud of the fact that Leningraders had staved off a widespread descent into degradation. Siege testimonies combine 'truth and reference' with subjective interpretations¹²⁵. Their blend of history and myth make them akin to historiographic metafiction. Mythopoetic tendencies are equally apparent in the recorded interviews and in published testimonies. Again, myth is utilised as a framework for explaining the past and the coming together of *sacrificio* and *sacra* which confrontation with death entailed.

¹²³ Refer to Mikhail Zolotonosov, '*N. Lomagin. V Tiskakh Goloda: Blokada Leningrada v Dokumentakh Germanskikh Spetsluzhb i NKVD*', *Novaia Russkaia Kniga*, no.2 (13), 2002. Zhurnalnyi Zal <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

¹²⁴ Viktoriia Voloshina, '*Blokadniki Pomniat o Khoroshem. o Strashnom – Molchat*' <Izvestia.ru> 7 September 2001 [accessed 07/06/2005].

¹²⁵ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo...' (pp. 267-68).

Each new siege discourse may contain various elements which have been recounted many times before, but in every case the chronological order of events and the presentation of small details is subtly modified. As Eileen Williams-Wanquet reminds us, 'the order of things is an effect of mythical discourse' and each 'new discourse can remodel one's vision of reality'¹²⁶. Yet, while the surface content may change the underlining message remains the same. It is an assertion of H.D.'s simple refrain 'We have a secret. We are Alive'¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ Eileen Williams-Wanquet, 'Marina Warner's Indigo...' (pp. 267-68).

¹²⁷ H.D., *Within the Walls*, p. 2

IN DEFENCE OF MYTH: THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD AS SACRED NARRATIVE

‘From the first months of the war, besieged Leningrad became what historian Pierre Nora has defined as a *lieu de memoire* (realm of memory) – one of those events that are immediately invested with symbolic significance and treated, even as they are unfolding, as if they are being commemorated in advance’¹.

In this passage Lisa A. Kirschenbaum identifies a key challenge for the study of memory of the siege. The blockade, she asserts, ‘easily lent itself to mythmaking’ and became an event commemorated as an evocation, ‘of personal trauma’ which established ‘the emotional authenticity of the national struggle’. At the same time ‘individuals wove state-sponsored images and narratives into their “personal” stories’ thereby ‘investing their wartime experiences with historic significance’².

Although the latter tendency is not always a conscious one, it can be expected that *blokadniki* have to some extent been influenced by official Soviet historiography over the years. Nevertheless, the testimonies presented in this study demonstrate veterans’ preoccupation with the presentation of vivid scenic memories which are selected because of the impact they had upon the individual at that time.

¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum: ‘Commemorations of the siege of Leningrad: a catastrophe in memory and myth’ (p. 106). Kirschenbaum quotes: Pierre Nora, ‘General introduction: between memory and history’, in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3 vols, I, p. 18.

² Lisa A. Kirschenbaum: ‘Commemorations ...’ (p. 106).

Kirschenbaum is correct though in her observation that commemoration and interpretation have been continually fused together in siege narrative. For example, the earlier chapter covering the historiography of the siege demonstrates how official Soviet accounts reified this event in a conscious effort to create the image of the 'hero city' whose populace defended the 'cradle of the revolution' against the Nazi hordes³. For the historian, separating empirical data from the emotive manner in which the significance of the siege has been portrayed both in collective and individual memory presents a formidable challenge. Yet, as the focus of this study concerns the interpretive aspects of siege testimony it is clear that such an approach would be counterproductive. In addition, siege mythologies, whether they are recanted at the national, or the personal level have assumed such a widely accepted significance amidst veterans that certain mythologies have arguably become a key part of the overall story.

Myth enables *blokadniki* to understand and explain their pasts. In this regard it provides a framework through which they can access and interpret their memories. For survivors myth is both autodidactical and autotherapeutic. On the other hand, for Soviet historians myth was a means of establishing key master narratives which correlated with the governing ideology of the day. Whether myth has been used as a tool for understanding personal recollections, or as a method of controlling

³ Refer for example to the opening of N.D Shumilov, '*V Dni Blokady*' (*In the Days of the Blockade*), (Moskva, *Uzdatel'stvo "Mysl"*, 1977).

interpretations of the past it is prevalent at almost all levels of siege discourse.

Correspondingly, myth theory presents itself as the most appropriate methodology for the study of siege memory.

GIORGIO AGAMBEN AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED

Lisa A. Kirschenbaum also states that ‘Leningraders endured sufferings that defy the imagination’⁴. Therefore, any attempt to recall or comprehend siege experiences touches upon a magnitude of suffering which renders the blockade sacred for those who lived through it. Yet, there is an inherent contradiction which lies at the heart of siege discourse as stories combine feelings of retrospective horror and grief with other sentiments such as a sense of nostalgia for an era when the community pulled together.

The revised edition of Daniil Granin and Ales’ Adamovich’s *Blokadnaia Kniga* and N. A Lomagin’s *Neizvestnaia Blokada* bring the darker side of the siege into focus. Nevertheless, the legend of the ‘hero city’ is not undermined by the presence of an underbelly of criminal activity. These contradictions find their echo in Giorgio Agamben’s theory of the ambivalence of the sacred as laid out in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. The sacred, according to Agamben denotes that which is both, ‘sacred and damned’⁵. The *homo sacer* is sacred yet also potentially

⁴ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum: ‘*Commemorations ...*’ (p. 106).

⁵ Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 78.

‘banned’ or ‘tabooed’⁶. Consequently, our concepts of the sacred and that which is taboo are interlinked. The fact that siege life encompassed extremes of human behaviour merely serves to underline its inherent sacrality.

Agamben notes that the modern age brought with it the possibility that all of us, depending on the circumstances could become *homines sacri*. Extraordinary circumstances such as those which occurred during the siege of Leningrad brought the activities of ordinary citizens to the fore. As participants in a grand drama which was quickly to become immortalised in the manner identified by Kirschenbaum they too had the potential to become *homines sacri*.

Giorgio Agamben’s concept also reconciles many other contradictions which manifest themselves during the course of siege testimonies. For example, while the bombing of the Badaev warehouses is recalled as a tragic event which led directly to the famine, *blokadniki* regard the interpretation of this event as sacred. As the bombing received scant attention in official Soviet historiography survivors feel that they have something to contribute in raising awareness of the significance of this event.

Mark Mathuray, in his discussion of contemporary African literature provides some useful clarifications of Agamben’s terminology. The *sacer*, he informs us, ‘is a thing or person consecrated to the gods’ while *sanctus*, ‘applies to a person who as a result of the attribution of divine favor, possesses a quality that raises him

⁶ Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer*...p. 79.

above other men'. Yet, the *homo sacer* is both a 'mythic hero and the sacrificial victim'⁷. Mathuray also quotes Mircea Eliade's observation that the sacred 'is at once sacred and defiled'⁸. Divine energy is also associated with danger. 'The sacred presents the universe as a *mysterium tremendum*, dreadful and ambiguous' and evokes both 'horror and reverence'. In this regard, understanding the sacred means grasping this fundamental contradiction, a contradiction which lies at the heart of its structural indeterminacy⁹.

This structural indeterminacy is reflected in other prominent siege narratives such as that of the *doroga zhizni* or *road of life* which portray the ice road across lake Ladoga as the saviour of Leningrad but also as a place of mayhem and death. Evacuation narratives encapsulate both a sense of relief that the suffering was about to come to an end but also portray deep-seated fears about the dangers involved.

Even individual objects such as that of the tiny oven called the *burzhuika* have a dual significance. As the only source of heat during the winter months of 1941-42 it became a crucial lifeline. Yet, as stoves across the city devoured family libraries, furniture and other belongings its meagre warmth was obtained at considerable cost.

The presence of the ultimate taboo, that of anthropophagy does not disprove myths of community spirit but rather further demonstrates that sense of ambivalence which characterises sacral discourse. Leningraders may have felt themselves to have been

⁷ Mark Mathuray, 'Realizing the Sacred: Power and Meaning in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*', *Research in African Literatures*, 34.3 (Autumn 2003), 46-65 (p. 48).

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 15.

⁹ Mark Mathuray, 'Realizing the Sacred...' (p. 48).

accursed by famine, bombing and searing winter temperatures yet their endurance brought about their later canonisation as *homines sacri*.

Svetlana Boym evocatively describes ‘the unspoken realm of cultural myths’ that protects the imagined community from outsiders’¹⁰. Perhaps the most strident of these myths among *blokadniki* is the feeling that they belong to a special generation. Tat’iana Letenkova, who was very willing to discuss the darker aspects of the Stalinist era nevertheless asserted that ‘The whole population of Leningrad today is absolutely different. They were more intelligent earlier’¹¹. Iurii Semeonovich simply stated that ‘I am not sure whether such an attack today could be withstood’¹². This is a controversial view, especially for younger generations of St. Petersburgers. Nevertheless, it is a crucial aspect of how *blokadniki* perceive themselves.

Viktor Lodkin maintained in his opening statement that ‘This is a story which does not exist in documents’¹³. The implication is that the *real* blockade for veterans is something which cannot be found in historiography. Consequently, as a theoretical approach which brings together apparent contradictions between siege testimonies and official accounts Agamben’s concept of the sacred is very relevant to this study.

MYTH AS CONTESTED GROUND

Lodkin’s narrative could be termed ‘the Other’s side of the story’ as he seeks to distance himself from the kind of ‘state-sponsored images’ identified by

¹⁰ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, p. 1.

¹¹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 14.

¹² BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 14.

¹³ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 3.

Kirschenbaum. This echoes earlier assertions made in the chapter *Oral History and the Veracity of Long Term Memory* (p. 3) which maintained that oral testimony has the potential to become a democratically repositioning force in how key lifetime events are recalled.

Myth can also function as an empowering matrix which anchors siege testimony on a bed of mythic fields consisting of shared significations, symbols and meanings. This encompasses that 'realm of unspoken cultural myths' which Svetlana Boym regards as creating a sense of *sobornost*. *Sobornost*, which is derived from the word *sobor*, or cathedral, describes a spiritual community which is founded upon a series of mythical alternatives to ordinary, everyday life. In the case of *blokadniki* it is also founded upon a sense of *sostradanie*, or shared suffering¹⁴.

Myth is also contested ground, being both the root of official discourse at the centre and individual testimonies at the margins which challenge the unblemished master narrative of the 'hero city'. Vladimir Kuliabko's memoirs are one such example. Kuliabko describes an official on duty at an evacuation point on the banks of lake Ladoga. Scores of dystrophic women and children were left to perish because they possessed neither money, tobacco nor other valuables with which to bribe him. Kuliabko ponders as to how many of the corpses lying on the ground around him were victims of this petty corruption¹⁵.

¹⁴ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places*..., p. 3. Boym links *sobornost* to the Russian concept of compassion as exemplified by *sostradanie*.

¹⁵ Vladimir Kuliabko, '*Blokadnyi Dnevnik*', *Okonchanie* (this diary was published in two parts in *Neva*), *Neva*, 2004, 3, *zhurnalnyi zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 8/06/2005].

Nevertheless, while there are a number of recent articles in Russian journals addressing the topic of official censorship of siege testimony, for obvious reasons veterans prefer to associate themselves with the heroic aspects of siege life rather than with instances of corruption or criminal activity¹⁶. Consequently, Kirschenbaum's observation that individuals weave state-sponsored images into their personal stories is a perceptive one. On the other hand, *blokadniki* such as Viktor Lodkin remain adamant that there are two blockades. The first is the siege as portrayed in historiography while the second is cherished by survivors as personal memory of the 900 days. The latter expresses that sense of shared understanding as defined by *sostradanie*.

These personal memories make up what could be termed *The Myth of the Siege of Leningrad*. Yet, after a degree of closer analysis I put forward the assertion that to describe the story of the Siege of Leningrad as sacred narrative is both more accurate and less prone to misinterpretation. Describing siege discourse as sacred narrative also creates a link between siege memories and the analysis of the sacred as put forward by Giorgio Agamben. Of course the distinction between myth and sacred narrative has often been blurred but there are notable differences between the two terms which are later explored and defined¹⁷.

¹⁶ Refer for example to: Arlen Bloom, 'Blokadnaia Tema v Tsenzurnoi Blokade', *Neva*, 2004, 1, *Zhurnalnyi zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 8/06/2005]. Catherine Merridale also notes that the veterans she interviewed tended to avoid unpleasant topics and framed their memories in 'the language of the vanished Soviet state...' Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: The Red Army, 1939-45* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), p. 333.

¹⁷ Refer for example to Alan Dundes: *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). This collection consists of a series of articles by different authors exploring the link between myth creation and sacred narrative.

As a prelude to the analysis below a discussion of recent debates in the field of myth theory is presented as well as a critical response to the work of historians in this area. By positioning my own approach to the analysis of myth within the context of wider debates it is hoped that the theory of myth presented in this thesis will be given more background and definition. Apart from Lisa A. Kirschenbaum's recent research very little if any research has been conducted on the siege which directly utilises myth theory. Therefore, a mythic interpretation of siege testimony can potentially open up new opportunities for discussion which repetition of well known and oft recited historical facts arguably cannot.

First of all, the concept of truth is explored with the intention of broadening our definition of what we mean by truth or fact. Viktor Lodkin refers in his testimony to certain 'facts' but these facts belong to that 'unspoken realm of cultural myths' described by Boym. As a reflection of *sostradanie* this parallel realm of 'facts' is arguably more real to *blokadniki* than the 'facts' documented in siege historiography. Correspondingly, broadening our concept of truth is vital if we are to open up possibilities for a more comprehensive analysis of myth production in siege narrative.

Secondly, with reference to the work of various myth theorists a series of differing approaches is examined with the intention of constructing a theoretical framework which can be further utilised in later chapters. This framework does not rely on

any one particular method of myth theory but attempts to construct a pluralist critical approach. In addition, I would assert that any attempts to de-mythologise siege narrative would result in an illegitimate reductionism which would be unrepresentative of blockade testimonies as a whole.

Recent frameworks presented by myth theorists provide a number of useful avenues for further analysis. Acceptance of the underlying potential of myth as an instructive and didactic genre is also less problematic for myth theorists than for historians¹⁸. It is also necessary to demonstrate why this is the case through reference to contemporary debates and points of contestation among various scholars in these respective fields.

In essence, the following analysis in this and later chapters attempts to ascertain what kind of myths occur during siege testimonies, what their function and purpose are and how they help us navigate a passage between officially designated master narratives and the 'Other's side of the story'. Orality and mythopoeia have traditionally been associated with one another and at the same time bring with them questions of veracity and verisimilitude. In this sense a positivistic historiographical approach which seeks to 'let the facts speak for themselves' would lead to an oversimplification of siege discourse. It is necessary first to ascertain what *kind* of facts or truths characterise siege biographies and to extend our definitions of veracity.

¹⁸ Nevertheless, certain historians such as Juliet Gardiner and Angus Calder have conducted ground breaking historical research with reference to mythopoetic processes. Refer for example to Angus Calder's *Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991) and Juliet Gardiner, *The Children's War: The Second World War Through the Eyes of the Children of Britain* (London: Portrait, 2005).

Myth theory is also akin to oral history methodology in that it is both contested ground and inherently a multi-disciplinary area of research. The examples cited below are drawn from a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, historical research, cultural and literary studies and analyses of fairy tales and folklore. This is because the study of mythopoetic narratives is enriched by a pluralist critical methodology which reflects a more postmodern approach to history.

What emerges overall is a 'plurality of stories' which 'involves contests about power and knowledge'¹⁹. The airing of uncensored or unadulterated siege testimonies does not necessarily lead to the discovery of broader revelations about siege life. Nevertheless, it does at least enable scholars to construct a more 'democratic' kind of history²⁰. In this regard myth theory, coupled with oral history, can potentially produce an analysis of siege testimony which is more representative of *blokadnikis*' belief-systems than that which has been provided by earlier siege historiography.

¹⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, 'History in Crisis: The Other's Side of the Story', *American Historical Review*, American Historical Association, 94. 3 (June 1989), 680-92 (pp. 690-691).

²⁰ Joan Wallach Scott, 'History in Crisis...' (pp. 691-692).

BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY: DIVERSIFYING THE CONCEPTS OF TRUTH ²¹

During the Autumn of 2005 in the journal *History and Theory* the historians Dirk Moses and Hayden White debated the role and purpose of historical research and proposed various possible future directions. At the same time the issue of history and myth arose and whether they should be considered antithetical by historians. In his reply to an earlier article by Moses, Hayden White addressed critics who accused him of failing to distinguish between myth and history.

‘As for my failure to distinguish myth from history...I repeat my assertion that, as Lévi-Strauss put it, history is the myth of the West. I have tried to show the extent to which the *modern* concept of history only represses, rather than dispels, mythic modes of thought and expression...’²² In other words, history may attempt to divest itself of myth but it is ultimately doomed to failure.

At the same time White condemns what he terms the ‘bifurcation of historical consciousness’ between ‘objective’ study of the past and the confrontation of ‘the great enigmas of temporality, death, and absence’. This has led in his view to a decline in the general interest of ‘cultivated persons’ in the work of professional historians and the rise of ‘practical historiography’ exemplified by ‘witness

²¹ See also Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Truth Without Scare Quotes: Post-Sokalian Genre Theory’, Subheading ‘Diversifying the Concepts of Truth’, *New Literary History*, 29.4 (Autumn 1998), 811-30 (p. 821).

²² Hayden White, ‘The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses, Forum: The Public Role of History’, *History and Theory*, 44 (October 2005), 333-338 (p. 337).

literature...the History Channel, docudramas' and the "collective memory" scam...²³.

Consequently, the debate between historians as to whether history and myth are primarily antithetical or inter-related continues. Interestingly, White lumps together 'witness literature' with the History Channel and docudramas and regards the rise in the popularity of such genres as a result of the alienation of 'cultivated persons' from the work of professional historians. Yet, as regards witness literature emanating from the testimonies of veterans of the First and Second World Wars the rise in popularity of this genre is not arguably the consequence of a general apathy towards historical debate. Generations of veterans and survivors are literally dying out and their testimonies are therefore increasingly valuable as collective and individual recollection of this era begins to fade.

Rather than polarizing the debate between whether history and myth should be regarded as antithetical Rebecca Collins provides the reader with a useful theoretical framework for navigating through these topics. Collins identifies myth as 'a fluid and provisional designator which colludes to cleanse and bolster the historical discourse'²⁴. Thus, myth can potentially refine historical discourse rather than undermine its objectivity.

²³ Hayden White, 'The Public Relevance of Historical Studies ...' (p. 335).

²⁴ Rebecca Collins, 'Concealing the Poverty of Traditional Historiography: myth as mystification in historical discourse', *Rethinking History*, 7:3 (November 2003) 341-65 (p. 342).

Collins also asserts that myth has often been characterised 'as a distorted, prejudiced account of the past' which 'is used as a contrast to history, which against the backdrop of myth, appears as the unbiased account of the past. In this way myth functions as a scapegoat upon which the philosophical problem of the necessarily historicist nature of all accounts of the past can be exported, incorporated and thereby silenced'²⁵.

Collins also discusses the concept of 'regimes of truth' which vary depending on the culture of which they are a part²⁶. Essentially, she regards the view that myth is ultimately a distortion of the past as a means for historians of circumventing any discussions about the inevitability of bias in historical research. Consequently, defining truth in relation to myth creates inherent tensions within the historical project²⁷.

The veracity of oral accounts and of popular myths will continue to vex historians because of the 'notoriously slippery' meanings and associations which myths convey²⁸. Nevertheless, as J. W Rogerson states 'The "real purpose" of myth is to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives'²⁹.

Correspondingly, myths are primarily didactic in character. Northrop Frye also identifies the functional aspects of myth by stating that rather than attempting to define what myths 'mean' it is 'more fruitful to study what in fact myths have been made to mean'³⁰. Essentially, the descriptive element in siege narrative is

²⁵ Rebecca Collins, 'Concealing... (p. 347).

²⁶ Rebecca Collins, 'Concealing... (p. 348).

²⁷ Again, this is not always the case, as demonstrated by reference above to the work of Juliet Gardiner and Angus Calder.

²⁸ J.W Rogerson, 'Slippery Words: Myth', in Alan Dundes (p. 70).

²⁹ J. W Rogerson, 'Slippery Words: Myth' (p. 70).

³⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 341.

primarily sigmatic in that 'it establishes a verbal replica of external phenomena, and its verbal symbolism is to be understood as a set of representative signs'³¹. These representative signs reflect not only certain mythologies but the meanings attributed to them by veterans. Ascertaining not just what siege myths mean but what they have been *made* to mean is a key aim of this study.

Nevertheless, while emphasising the positive aspects of myth production it is also important to acknowledge that myth can be a pernicious force. In this regard it again reflects that sense of ambivalence which Agamben attributes to the sacred. Agamben notes that the modern world has exposed us to unprecedented violence 'in the most profane and banal ways'³². He is referring here to the myth of Aryan supremacy propagated by the German National Socialist movement, a myth which found its ultimate expression in the Holocaust.

Yet, even in post-war East and West Germany myth was not shunned because it was tarnished by previous association. On the contrary, it was rehabilitated as a means of disseminating new political myths aimed at giving the German people a fresh identity. Clare Flanagan identifies the myth of a new 'historic mission' as central to East German ideology. She also underlines the 'connection between story-telling and moving forward into the political future'³³. Perhaps both these embryonic states were also trying to create 're-imagined communities' in that they were focusing on

³¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy...* p. 353.

³² Giorgio Agamben: *Homo Sacer...*p. 114.

³³ Clare Flanagan, 'Political Myth and Germany 1945-49', *German Life and Letters*, 57:1 (January 2004) 111-25 (p. 112).

concepts of German identity which related to the past but which excluded reference to the Nazi period.

Robert Walinski-Kiehl in an essay examining the political mythology of the fledgling GDR writes that 'Political myths can be defined as accessible, simplified historical narratives that transmit information about the origins, meaning and political destiny of regimes'³⁴. Correspondingly, myth gave the new German states an awareness of both distant origins and political destiny, and thus imparted a sense of mission and fresh impetus to a people eager to look forward rather than to the immediate past.

The fledgling state of Israel also attempted to construct a new mythology which could enable its people to look forward. Yet, here too, myth became contested ground. Yoram Bilu states that 'National myths and commemorative practices, as cultivated and disseminated by state authorities, may permeate and affect personal landscapes of memory related to grief, mourning, and psychic trauma'³⁵. As stated earlier these national myths can find their way into personal stories but they can also create tensions between the state and individuals.

Bilu goes on to observe that although the Israeli government preferred to celebrate patriotic myths associated with the Day of Independence, the people drove up 'from

³⁴ Robert Walinski-Kiehl, 'Reformation History and Political Mythology in the German Democratic Republic, 1949–89', *European History Quarterly*, 34: 1 (2004), 43-67 (p. 43).

³⁵ Yoram Bilu, 'War-Related Loss and Suffering in Israeli Society: An Historical Perspective', *Israel Studies*, 5. 2 (Autumn 2000), 1-31 (p. 2).

below' a desire to establish a preceding day of remembrance³⁶. The Israeli government gave in to pressure and the resulting day of commemoration which was free from what Bilu terms as the 'routinised' patriotic themes of rebirth has gained more public resonance as it became 'suffused... with "sacred" or transcendental values'³⁷. Essentially, as Bilu observes, the significance of commemorative events will always rely on 'The interdigitation between the personal and the collective...'³⁸

Interestingly, as Bettina Völter and Michal Dasberg note, it was the Israeli government's obsession with myths of heroism and resistance, and its emphasis upon the Warsaw ghetto uprising which led to the suppression of broader discussions focusing on the Holocaust right up until the late 1980's³⁹. Oral testimony brought the true horrors of the Shoah into focus, driving up 'from below' personal mythologies which challenged decades of Israeli state propaganda.

Myth can consequently be at the centre of personal recollections while also functioning as a tool utilised by governments and political elites in order to censor aspects of our pasts. Similarly, during the 20th century myth has been regarded both as a means of restoring and entrenching tradition and as a signifier

³⁶⁻³⁷ Yoram Bilu, 'War-Related Loss...' (p. 7). See also Meira Weiss, 'Bereavement, Commemoration, and Collective Identity in Contemporary Israeli Society', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 70.2 (1997), 91-101.

³⁸ Yoram Bilu , 'War-Related Loss ...' (p. 2).

³⁹ Völter and Dasberg write that 'In fact, the end of the 1980's marks the beginning of a public discussion...of the tribulations not only of survivors but also of their descendants'. 'Similarities and Differences in Public Discourse about the Shoah in Israel and West and East Germany', Bettina Völter and Michal Dasberg, in *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, p. 15.

which should be unmasked simply for possessing those very same traits. T.S Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* has been described as lying 'at the heart of modernist mythopoeia'⁴⁰. Yet despite its innovations *The Waste Land* was a reflection of Eliot's quest to utilise the mythical method as a means of confronting the 'futility' and 'anarchy' of contemporary history⁴¹.

Roland Barthes sought to reveal the underlying consequences of myth's potential as a guardian of tradition. Barthes equates 'myth with ideology: it confirms the status quo'⁴². Consequently, he condemns myth for possessing the same qualities which Eliot valued. He also observes that 'Myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the way it utters this message...'⁴³. This echoes Frye's statement that rather than attempting to define what myths 'mean' it is 'more fruitful to study what in fact myths have been made to mean'⁴⁴.

Barthes' identification of myth as being 'representative of bourgeois thinking' was perhaps less revelatory than his ability to transport myth into the modern world⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ Leonard Coupe, *Myth* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 30.

⁴¹ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 40. Coupe is responding to T.S Eliot's advocacy of what he terms 'the mythical method' as put forward in his article, "Ulysses", Order and Myth', (1923) in *Selected Prose*, edited by F. Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), pp. 37-44.

⁴² Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 164.

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 117. There are aspects of Barthes' assertions on the topic of myth and ideology which can be questioned. For example, his statement that 'Revolution excludes myth' (p. 159). In the case of the Russian October Revolution a *lieu de memoire* was created from the outset and was later epitomised by Sergei Eisenstein's film *October* (1927).

⁴⁴ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 341.

⁴⁵ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 157.

By describing ornamental cookery, wrestling, and the face of Garbo as contemporary myths he opened up new avenues for the study of myth which brought our attention to the persistence and versatility of the mythopoetic imagination⁴⁶. By castigating myth as a vehicle for retrenchment he merely succeeded in rehabilitating it as a topic relevant for contemporary debate.

David Gervais notes that 'even if myth itself seems defunct, the need for myth remains as strong as ever'. He goes on to state that 'We mythologise figures like David Beckham and the Queen Mother and Madonna every bit as much as any Renaissance poet mythologised his Britomarts and Clorindas'⁴⁷. Carolyn Cooper concurs with this view by underlining that myths continue to be created in modern times. 'They get passed from person to person, and they get studied'⁴⁸. The mythopoetic imagination is a fundamental part of storytelling. Thus, as stories get 'passed from person to person' the interpretative aspect of these tales becomes ever more pronounced. At a certain juncture myth can even *become* the story. This is evident in recollections of the bombing of the Badaev warehouses.

Although anthropologists are often working with myths which have a considerably longer pedigree than recent mythologies, their observations about how myth defines the identity of a given community are also relevant to this study. Paula Gunn Allen's groundbreaking book *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in*

⁴⁶ For a much more recent article written in the Barthian mould refer also to Sarah Leahy: 'The matter of myth: Brigitte Bardot, stardom and sex', *Studies in French cinema*, 3. 2 (2002), 71-81 (p. 71).

⁴⁷ David Gervais, The persistence of myth, *PN Review*, 29.1 (September-October 2002), 47-55 (p. 54).

⁴⁸ Carolyn Cooper, 'Myth, Rumor, and History: The Yankee Whittling Boy as Hero and Villain', *Technology and Culture*, 44.1 (January 2003), 82-96 (p. 82).

American Indian Traditions has fuelled a lively debate not only about the visionary qualities of the mythopoetic imagination but about how these visions influence reality⁴⁹. *Blokadniki* reiterate certain mythologies because they are 'real' to them. They represent the essence of the story in a manner of equal importance to that of factual data.

Jane Caputi states that 'Paula Gunn Allen argues that myths are stories that are sacred not only because they are meaningful but because they are able to influence reality, imbued with the power to transform something (or someone) from one state or condition to another'⁵⁰. She creates a link between ancient mythologies and recent mythopoetic manifestations by observing that 'The energetic elements of this mythic vocabulary can be found, read, and communicated within both ancient and contemporary forms, from the worlds of religion as well as art and popular culture'⁵¹.

Kelley E. Rowley quotes Gunn's statement that 'myth and ritual are based on visionary experience'⁵². Rowley also observes that 'Mythopoetic vision is a view of existence that creates identity and community'⁵³. Interestingly, Rowley highlights a contemporary dilemma faced by mythologists over whether myth or ritual came first. 'Some believe that ritual is an enactment of a myth', giving myth

⁴⁹ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1992).

⁵⁰ Jane Caputi, 'On the Lap of Necessity: A Mythic Reading of Teresa Brennan's Energetics Philosophy', *Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy*, 16.2 (Spring 2001), 1-26 (pp. 3-4).

⁵¹ Jane Caputi, 'On the Lap of Necessity...' (p. 4).

⁵²⁻⁵³ Kelley E. Rowley, 'Re-inscribing Mythopoetic Vision in Native American Studies', *The American Indian Quarterly*, 26. 3 (Summer 2002), 491-500 (pp. 494-95). Rowley is quoting Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*...p. 107.

supremacy 'while others feel that myth tells about the ritual in story form, thus privileging ritual'⁵⁴.

Ritual represents the functionary aspect of myth. It can both be a vehicle for myth production and a manifestation of the mythopoetic imagination. The fluidity and versatility of myth as a signifier surely renders efforts to ascertain the primacy of ritual over myth or visa versa as a fairly pointless exercise. It is rather that myth conjoined with ritual can have a therapeutic effect on individuals and communities. As John K. Riches has asserted 'myths...are there not simply to impose a particular view of the world and a particular social order on a particular people, but rather to attempt to alleviate the deep-set problems and tensions within a given society'⁵⁵. Thus, myth can be both restorative and regenerative. A notable example of the latter being the dissemination of political myths by the postwar East and West German governments.

While various siege myths remain apparently immutable and largely unrevised in the minds of veterans the rituals accompanying them have clearly changed. Ritual has moved from the realm of actual experience to the act of symbolising those experiences through commemorative events. For example, by placing small pieces of bread on the graves of those who perished *blokadniki* are creating a chain of significations which are commonly understood by survivors. The small *kusochek*

⁵⁴ Kelley E. Rowley, 'Re-inscribing Mythopoetic Vision...' (pp. 494-95).

⁵⁵ John K. Riches, 'Conflicting Mythologies: Mythical Narrative in the Gospel of Mark', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 24.2 (2001), 29-50 (p. 35).

khleba (piece of bread) represents the 125 grams of bread distributed to *izhdiventsy* (dependents) during the winter of 1941–42⁵⁶. This was the lowest ration given out during the siege and it signified certain death from eventual malnutrition if it was not supplemented by other foodstuffs. Correspondingly, this ritual is both an act of remembrance and a covenant of understanding, a shared metaphor of what it means to suffer together (*sostradanie*) and to lose both family and friends.

Rituals enacted during the siege such as the sharing out of tiny crumbs of bread amongst families remain deeply embedded in the consciousness of survivors⁵⁷.

The fact that there is no longer a food shortage in the city has little effect on the habits and attitudes of *blokadniki*. Natalia Kostrova asserts that she never throws any extra food away⁵⁸. Eleonora Fedoseeva saves any extra scraps for the birds⁵⁹.

Lidiia Lifanova stated that she had not thrown away a piece of bread for 60 years.

She asserted that ‘For me bread is priceless’⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 486. Adamovich and Granin also mention the laying of sweets and *papirosy* (cheap rolled cigarettes) upon graves. This ritual echoes the Jewish tradition of placing stones upon graves. The grave or *beit olam* (permanent house) is believed to be occupied by the soul of the deceased for some time after burial. The placing of stones upon the grave is meant to ensure that the dead remain in their graves. See also Rabbi Jonathan Maltzman, ‘Judean Memorial Gardens: Why Stones are Placed on the Grave’ <<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/stones.htm>> [accessed 31/01/2006].

⁵⁷ Tat’iana Letenkova recalled that her mother carefully rationed out bread during the day thereby creating a sense of normal mealtimes. BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Natalia Aleksandrovna Kostrova, article by Liudmila Zapozina, journal *Piat’ Uglov*, published at <www.pobeda-60.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

⁵⁹ Eleonora Fedoseeva – interview with Maria Okuneva, ‘*Strashno, kak my zhili, shto eli*’, *Zhizn’*, *Vypusk*: 104 (1868), 14 April 2005, <Ytro.ru> [accessed 5/06/2005].

⁶⁰ Irina Titova, ‘Blockade Survivors Who Lived by Bread Alone’, *The St. Petersburg Times*, 26 January, 2001, issue 639 (6) <www.spb.ru> [accessed 1/02/2006].

Others such as Galina Glukhova hold on to objects which symbolise the 900 days, for example, a damaged painting which is probably worthless in terms of value yet highly symbolic for this veteran⁶¹. There are also mental rituals which exorcise disturbing memories. In this instance, myth clearly performs an autotherapeutic function.

Many *blokadniki* will have told their stories on numerous occasions. Correspondingly, the recitation of the story becomes a ritual in itself. Myth structures the story and provides siege narratives with a series of markers. Thus, the Badaev warehouses, the symbolism of the ration of 125 grams and the collective spirit as embodied by the cleaning up of the city in the Spring of 1942 are central pillars around which survivors can weave their own personal experiences. It is also important to stress that myth is not utilised as a smoke screen but can even be a source of solace and comfort for veterans. It reassures them that their pasts have meaning.

Rebecca Collins writes that myth is also ‘a deeply embedded cultural belief; that is, a claim of such significance for a cultural entity that it becomes engrained within the group and usurps the truth of what actually happened because of the cohesion it provides for the group’⁶². Collins appears to be concerned with how myth distorts the truth as opposed to its functional aspects. In this sense Margaret Hiley’s statement that ‘The message of the myth is: “This really happened” is

⁶¹ Galina Glukhova., ‘*Kazhdyi Den’ Mog Stats’ Poslednim...*’, *Soiuz Zhurnalistov*, 27 January 2004 <domjur@snpi.org.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

⁶² Rebecca Collins, ‘Concealing...’ (p. 345).

much more applicable to siege testimony⁶³. *Blokadniki* use myth as a means of reaffirming their membership of the 'imagined' community but they refer to myth primarily as a means of asserting that 'This really happened'.

Rather than indicting myth for masquerading as truth Leonard Coupe identifies its sheer persistence as a reflection of its didactic potential. He reminds us that the problem of defining truth in relation to myth stretches back to the original separation of *mythos* (word, or speech) from *logos* (logic) by the ancient Greeks who prized the pure rationality of *logos* above the more symbolic and evocative qualities of *mythos*. 'The former came to signify fantasy; the latter, rational argument'⁶⁴. This separation of *logos* from *mythos* was taken further during the Enlightenment, a period characterised by a strand of European thought which disseminated 'the belief that humanity' had 'successfully transcended the need for mythical forms of thought'⁶⁵.

Coupe contradicts this earlier belief by identifying the remarkable fluidity and durability of myth and regards 'the error of modernity' as being defined by 'the myth of mythlessness. Whenever myth has been pronounced dead, artists have risen up to proclaim it alive'⁶⁶. He goes on to state that myth is not 'a failed attempt to articulate rational truth' but is rather 'the creative impulse underlying human

⁶³ Margaret Hiley, 'Myth and Mythology in Tolkien', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 50.4 (2004), 838-60 (p. 849).

⁶⁴⁻⁶⁵ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, pp. 9-10 and p. 13.

⁶⁶ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 19.

history...Myth shapes history, and therefore it shapes culture'. Correspondingly, 'Mythos precedes and informs *logos*'⁶⁷. This echoes Rebecca Collins belief that myth can potentially 'cleanse and bolster' historical discourse. Myth, therefore, does not undermine objectivity but illuminates our understanding of the world.

Alan Dundes also counters the assumption that myth is inherently an erroneous or a false tale by asserting that 'myth may constitute the highest form of truth, albeit in a metaphorical guise'⁶⁸. Myths, if they are to continue to survive within a given community need to be underpinned by a weight of social consent. This is also true of siege myths which cannot endure without the stamp of social approval.

This stamp of social approval converges with the enactment of certain rituals which impart communities with distinct identities. Clifford Geertz writes that 'In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world'⁶⁹. Geertz observes that simple acts, even 'the decoration of a grave' can be sacred and symbolic rituals which induce in men certain 'moods and motivations' and a general conception 'of the order of existence'. Cultural life consists of 'conceptions and dispositions, or the world as imagined and the world as lived...'⁷⁰. Geertz wishes to distinguish clearly between culture and the social system. He defines culture 'as an ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place'. The social system,

⁶⁷ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 119-121.

⁶⁸ Alan Dundes, Introduction to *Sacred Narrative...*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Clifford Geertz, *Constructing Ritual: The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 112-113.

⁷⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Constructing Ritual...*p. 144.

on the other hand, is 'the pattern of social interaction itself'. Here, he contrasts what he terms an existing 'framework of beliefs' with 'interactive behaviour'. Culture consists of terms which are both interpreted and used as a source of guidance whereas the 'social system is the actual form that action takes'⁷¹.

The social system which defined the era in which *blokadniki* grew up has now disappeared. A key question explored in the chapter covering patriotism and ideology relates to how, if at all, veterans have distanced themselves from the 'framework of beliefs' which shaped their upbringing. Though a minority of interviewees condemned certain aspects of the Stalinist era the majority sought to rehabilitate this aspect of their past.

The following quote by Iurii Semeonovich, a former worker at the *Elektrosila* factory is highly representative. 'Very well, we are talking about the Soviet period. Well, then a lot of negative things happened but there were also extremely positive aspects. (At this point several other *blokadniki* in the room nodded in agreement). Everyone was properly organised and even the children worked. They would also go into the hospitals and give concerts for the wounded'⁷².

Semeonovich is making a clear correlation between the Soviet era and a sense of order and duty to the surrounding community. Thus, despite 'negative things' the 'ordered system of meaning and of symbols' disseminated by Socialist values provided social interaction with an impetus and guaranteed that it was properly

⁷¹ Clifford Geertz, pp. 144-45, also cited in Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory: Ritual Practice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 27-33.

⁷² BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 12.

organised. As Semeonovich's comments were clearly accepted by the other *blokadniki* present during the interview it is safe to assume that he is not alone in his assertion. If this 'ordered system of meaning and of symbols' is questioned then the social interaction which took place in response to this system is also undermined.

The moral basis for the defence of Leningrad was profound in that Leningraders faced annihilation. Nevertheless, the defence of Leningrad and in particular of 'Lenin's city' was defined along the lines of Communist ideology. Ideology and social action were so intertwined that *blokadniki* are cautious about distancing themselves from the Stalinist era. Geertz seeks to contrast 'interactive behaviour' from an existing 'framework of beliefs'. For *blokadniki* who were teenagers during the siege the distinction between the two appears to be blurred. Thus, to question the framework of beliefs associated with their formative years is also to question the interactive behaviour which characterised their wartime activities.

'THIS REALLY HAPPENED': THE SACRED AND THE REAL

Essentially, rituals such as commemorative events and gatherings of veterans have both a symbolic and sacred meaning for the participants. The connection between the assertion that 'this really happened' also bridges the gap between sacredness and ontology which merges the 'sacred' and the 'real'. N. Wyatt

concurs that ‘as human societies transcend the biological and experience a cultural world, they do so by a process of reification, by what P. Berger and T. Luckmann called ‘the social construction of reality’⁷³.

Interestingly Wyatt regards myth not as a literary genre but as ‘a mind-set’.

Myths are ‘stories (or histories) about “reality” which narratizes experience in terms of an archetype or paradigm, which uses allusions to such narratives as symbolic short-cuts in other contexts, as in cult, meditation or prayer, or even carries such forms across into political thinking...’ This mind-set is defined by the ‘activity of the mythic mind, or the mind in myth-mode’⁷⁴.

Commemorations fuse the symbolic and the sacred together creating a kind of *religious nostalgas* which brings with it an ‘encounter with an earlier life’⁷⁵.

These events also form part of what David Ohana describes as a ‘community of memory’. This community adopts and abandons forms ‘in accordance with changing interests and circumstances, and with a free play between the different dimensions of memory’. The members of this community have previously selected ‘from the past those elements that suited them and integrated them into their outlook and preoccupations in the present; conversely, the images of the past shaped the present consciousness of the community’⁷⁶. This method of selection goes hand in

⁷³ N. Wyatt, ‘The Mythic Mind’ (p. 24). See also P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The social construction of reality* (London: Harmondsworth, 1967).

⁷⁴ N. Wyatt, ‘The Mythic Mind’ (p. 50).

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in *Illuminations*, transl. by H. Zohn (London, 1973), pp. 184-85.

⁷⁶ David Ohana, ‘Kfar Etzion: The Community of Memory and the Myth of Return’, *Israel Studies*, 7.2 (Summer 2002), 145-74 (p. 146).

hand with a process of sacralisation which designates a specific territory, experience or event with a special meaning which then becomes celebrated through the inculcation of story-telling and ritual.

Within the context of postwar East and West Germany myth played a redemptive or corrective role. Walter Benjamin's belief in the regenerative potential of myth was highly prescient in regard to the future of his country. Myth bore the potential of offering 'alternative perspectives on the social-historical experience of entire nations and civilizations'⁷⁷. At its heart lay the possibility of *versohnung* or reconciliation which could lead ultimately to a 're-enchantment of the world'⁷⁸.

Of course, commemorations of the Great Patriotic War have an entirely different character to commemorative events in Germany. For the latter the possibility of *versohnung* or atonement for the past is paramount. Myth played a decisive role in initiating a break with the immediate past in postwar Germany but the opposite is true in the Soviet case. The Soviet Union was at the apogee of its power during the immediate post-war era and subsequent commemorations serve to underpin ingrained belief-systems and perceptions gained through the experience of war.

Nevertheless, there is an ideological backdrop to these events which separates veterans from subsequent generations. Amongst the 'forest of symbols' associated with anniversaries lie the language and terminology associated with

⁷⁷ Cited also by Joseph Mali, 'The Reconciliation of Myth: Benjamins' Homage to Bachofen', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60. 1 (January 1999), 165-87 (p. 170).

⁷⁸ Joseph Mali, 'The Reconciliation of Myth...' pp. 168 and 174.

the Stalinist era. Catherine Merridale also notes that ‘Stalinist ideology had shaped the language of the time, becoming part of everybody’s universe...’⁷⁹. As a former Leningrad tour guide Svetlana Boym recalls how the ‘hero city’ was characterised along ideological lines. Leningrad had a ‘precise iconography’ and on postcards, ‘even the clouds had Soviet classical shapes’⁸⁰.

Consequently, there are values associated with these commemorative events which no longer are upheld by a weight of social consent across the generations. It is therefore interesting to posit the possibility that ideological myths surrounding siege discourse may be the first to die out. The fact that they already seemed to have disappeared in the Russian media’s presentations of siege narrative may be a manifestation of this trend. Whether this is a reflection of Boym’s ‘de-ideologisation’, or a refusal to accept the need for a Russian version of *versöhnung* is open to question. It may be simply that ideological myths surrounding the siege are regarded as an irrelevance or as no longer of interest to younger generations.

For Walter Benjamin myth was ‘the “origin” of everything beautiful and meaningful in the world, and ‘origin is the goal’. Perhaps commemorative events above all offer another kind of ‘re-enchantment’ with the past and remind the participants of the origin of this ritual. In this regard they are primarily assertions that ‘This really happened’. They merge the sacred and the real. This directly contradicts Donald

⁷⁹ Catherine Merridale writes that ‘Stalinist ideology had shaped the language of the time, becoming part of everybody’s universe by 1941’. *Ivan’s War*, p. 330.

⁸⁰ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places*...p. 142.

M. Bahr's statement that '(Myth) relates the speaker of the word to a text *and* to another person. A myth is a text that the speaker of the word *myth* does not believe but that someone else known or imagined by the speaker *does* believe'⁸¹.

Concerning siege testimonies key mythologies are deployed as a means of attributing human experiences with a deeper resonance. Correspondingly, myth makes the story more, rather than less plausible because it makes sense of former experiences.

Myth is not 'imperfect history' but in the case of commemorative events it is 'applied history'⁸². The latter phrase, coined by S.A Shokpeka imbues myth with a practical role which bolsters historical discourse in the same manner outlined by Rebecca Collins. By describing myth as 'imperfect history' we also touch upon what Peter Novick described as the 'objectivity question'. This question is defined by, 'the nature of our work...ways of thinking about the products we present...and claims we make on behalf of those products'⁸³. Of course, as soon as any claim is lodged in relation to a historical event or commemoration of that event objectivity is arguably at least partially lost. History, like myth, cannot obtain perfect neutrality.

The emergence of a number of African myth theorists such as S.A Shokpeka and Wole Ogundele, inspired primarily by the poetry of Wole Soyinka, has provided myth with a fresh impetus. They regard myth and oral history as a means of

⁸¹ Donald M. Bahr, 'Bad News: The Predicament of Native American Mythology', *Ethnohistory*, 48. 4 (Autumn 2001), 587-612 (p. 589).

⁸² S. A Shokpeka, 'Myth in the Context of African Traditional Histories: Can it be called "Applied History?"', *History in Africa, African Studies Association*, 32 (2005), 485-91(p. 491).

⁸³ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: 1988), pp. 628-29.

redefining African identity during the post-colonial era⁸⁴. Again, myth is prized for its redemptive or regenerative potential. For Soyinka, history and myth are not antithetical but are ‘inextricably linked’⁸⁵.

Ogundele warns though that ‘Oral history may most times faithfully tell what happened, but it is not above distorting it, especially in the area of political history where vested interests always abound...’⁸⁶ This leads us back to the question of ideology and the reality that Soviet veterans have a vested interest in rehabilitating aspects of the Stalinist past. Commemorative events of the Great Patriotic War do not recall a problematic past in the manner that German commemorations do. Nevertheless, the ideological dimension creates tensions within the wider ‘Community of Memory’ when on certain anniversaries older generations are joined by their younger counterparts.

Michael Feige, on the other hand, provides an explanation of how such tensions are potentially resolved. He highlights the existence of a ‘problematic past’ that cannot be dismissed because it ‘does not fit easily into an identity-enhancing narrative’. He goes on to assert that ‘Studies on the commemoration of problematic pasts reflect an understanding of the subtle relation between historical events and collective identity, showing that communities are able to use different

⁸⁴ Refer to S.A Shokpeka, ‘Myth in the Context...’ (p. 491). Refer also to Wole Ogundele, ‘Devices of Evasion: The Mythic versus the Historical Imagination in the Postcolonial Novel’, *Research in African Literatures*, 33. 3 (Autumn 2002), 125-39.

⁸⁵ This concept is further explored in Mark Mathuray’s article, *Realizing the Sacred: Power and Meaning in Chinua Achebe’s Arrow of God* (see above). Refer also to Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁸⁶ Wole Ogundele, ‘Devices of Evasion...’ (p. 133).

pasts, some of them awkward and unpleasant, for their symbolic needs'⁸⁷. In essence, this involves a process of 'selective remembering and forgetting' which allows different generations of Russians to come together on these special occasions⁸⁸.

In summary, the approach to the analysis of myth as outlined in this chapter concurs with myth theorists who have sought to rehabilitate myth as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of our pasts. This does not mean however that the more pernicious characteristics of myth employed by regimes such as the Nazi government are not taken into account. Ogundele's warning that oral history, especially within the realms of political history can serve vested interests is also demonstrated by the complexities of ideology within the Russian context. In this regard, while this study seeks to represent faithfully the views of *blokadniki* it does not wish to fall into the trap of appearing to support any rehabilitation of the Stalinist era. Nevertheless, despite the fact that ideology has faded from view in media discussions about the siege in Russia, it remains an important topic as regards siege narrative.

Myth, depending on the context can be either therapeutic (Riches) or ideological (Barthes), or a mixture of both. Myth can either be revered as a bulwark of order and tradition (T.S Eliot) or prized for its regenerative potential (Benjamin). Perhaps Benjamin's analysis is the most evocative in that it promises a

⁸⁷ Michael Feige, 'Rescuing the Person from the Symbol: "Peace Now" and the Ironies of Modern Myth', *History & Memory*, 11. 1 (Spring/Summer 1999), 141-68 (p. 143).

⁸⁸ Michael Feige, 'Rescuing the Person ...' (p. 143).

re-enchantment of the world. Myth, far from being in opposition to truth 'may constitute the highest form of truth, albeit in a metaphorical guise'.

The assertions of the Enlightenment period which maintained that humanity had 'successfully transcended the need for mythical forms of thought' have proved premature. As Michael Feige states 'Claims that myth is not compatible with modernity have to confront the overwhelming evidence that myth does in fact appear, and even flourishes, in the modern age'⁸⁹.

Siege survivors are telling us that 'this *really* happened' but at the same time they are imparting something deeper about themselves, their culture and their understanding of the world. Myth lies at the apex of this interpretive process. In one sense, while recounting these experiences *blokadni* are talking as much to themselves as they are to the interviewer. Myth therefore serves both autotherapeutic and autodidactic functions. It is above all an explanatory system which underpins and orders key lifetime events. As Leonard Coupe states myth is not 'a failed attempt to articulate rational truth' but is rather 'the creative impulse underlying human history...Myth shapes history, and therefore it shapes culture'⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ Michael Feige, 'Rescuing the Person...' (p. 142).

⁹⁰ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, pp. 119-21.

THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD MYTH OR LEGEND?

One of the key problems associated with the study of myth is that the distinction between terms such as myth, legend, or folktale have often been blurred. In addition, the term sacred narrative is applied throughout this thesis as a means of describing the essential character of siege testimony and it is necessary briefly to explain why this term has been chosen above others. A central premise of this study is that although the siege has often been described as a legendary or epic tale there has been an absence of more rigorous analysis focusing on how this emotive *lieu de memoire* was created. Correspondingly, it is important to explain what is meant by terms such as legend, myth and sacred narrative within this context to clarify the terminology used in later chapters.

Catherine Merridale wrote that for veterans of the Great Patriotic War ‘memory is sacred, live’⁹¹. Interestingly, she stated that the war had brought few benefits to the generation that fought. Commemoration was an occasion to remember what had been lost rather than what had been gained. It was this sense of loss which made such occasions sacred.

Vladimir Putin also recently underlined the sacralisation of siege memory through sending a letter to siege survivors describing key anniversaries as ‘sacred’ holidays⁹².

The siege and the Great Patriotic War as a whole are routinely attributed with sacral

⁹¹ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 335.

⁹² Irina Titova, ‘President Marks Siege Anniversary in the City’, St. Petersburg Times, 30 January 2004, issue no. 939 (7) <www.spb.ru> [accessed 1/02/2006].

and mythological meanings. Yet how can we describe the story of the siege of Leningrad as a whole? Is it even relevant or realistic to attempt to do so? The fact that as Lisa A. Kirschenbaum confirms, this event was invested with such symbolic significance from the outset means that myth creation has always been at the heart of siege narrative. Not as a means of deflecting us from the facts but as a tool for grappling with the enormity of the loss suffered by the city’s populace⁹³. Statistics do not suffice in such circumstances and there are also numerous instances of human sacrifice and accounts of altruistic acts which merely add to the impression that the siege has entered the realm of sacred mythology. In consequence, it is relevant to attempt to define what kind of stories comprise siege testimonies before proceeding to any closer analysis of their content.

The anthropologist William Bascom in his essay: *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives* provides us with a basic framework which gives definition to the boundaries between the genres of myth, legend and folktale. Table 1 places myth, legend and folktale within the following categories:

Table 1
Formal Features of Prose Narratives

PROSE NARRATIVES			
1. Formal features (Form of prose narrative)	<u>Myth</u>	<u>Legend</u>	<u>Folktale</u>
2. Conventional opening	None	None	Usually

⁹³ I refer here to myth production in individual siege testimonies. Soviet historiography clearly deployed myth production as a means of shaping and controlling the manner in which siege discourse was presented.

3. Told after dark	No Restrictions	No Restrictions	Usually
4. Belief	Fact	Fact	Fiction
5. Setting	Some time and some place	Some time and some place	Timeless, placeless
a. Time	Remote	Recent	Any time
b. Place	Earlier or other world	World as it is today	Any place
6. Attitude	Sacred	Sacred or secular	Secular
7. Principal character	Non-human	Human	Human or non-human ⁹⁴

Bascom writes that ‘if a prose narrative begins with a conventional opening formula... and if it should be told only after dark, it is a folktale rather than a myth or a legend’⁹⁵. Folktales are generally regarded as fiction and open commonly with the formula ‘Once upon a time...’ Bascom also clarifies the distinction between fact and fiction by stating that they refer not ‘to historical or scientific fact’ but ‘*only* to the beliefs of those who tell and hear these tales...’⁹⁶ Clearly, as *blokadniki* are usually referring to lived experiences and recollections emanating from tangible daily or historical events there is a solid factual basis to their recollections. In this regard, to describe siege narratives as folktales would be patently absurd.

⁹⁴ William Bascom, ‘The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives, Table 2: Formal features of prose narrative’ in Alan Dundes: *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, 5-29, p. 11.
⁹⁵⁻⁹⁶ William Bascom, ‘The Forms of Folklore...’ (pp. 11-12).

Nevertheless, there are individual stories within this epic that come close to resembling folktales. Bascom states that folktales often contain some kind of supernatural element and there is a recurrent strand of siege narrative which leans towards a mystic as opposed to a purely mythic direction⁹⁷. For example, Salisbury recounts the myth of the noble bandit: 'A young girl was robbed by thieves and lost everything, even her clothes, but one of them felt remorse and left the girl his leather jacket. When she got home she found a packet with 5,000 rubles in the pocket'. In another version it was a 'loaf of bread and a large package of butter'⁹⁸. There is also the myth of the guardian angel recounted in Granin's chapter *U kazhdogo byl svoi spasitel'*⁹⁹. Again, these tales have attained a certain air of mysticism.

Perhaps the story which comes closest to a folktale is that of the cat train covered in the previous chapter¹⁰⁰. Bascom's second category refers to the absence of a conventional opening in myths or legends. Although it is true that survivors often refer to the bombing of the Badaev warehouses during their initial accounts this is certainly not always the case. Therefore, it would be too simplistic to state that these stories have a conventional opening. In reference to the third and fourth categories there are no restrictions as to the time of day when these stories are told and *blokadniki* believe their accounts to be highly factual. As their memories have a distinct time frame and location, these stories unfold in 'some time and some place' (refer to table 1).

⁹⁷ William Bascom, 'The Forms of Folklore...' (p. 15).

⁹⁸ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*, p. 454.

⁹⁹ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ Between Myth and History: Siege Testimony as 'Historiographic Metafiction' (pp. 132-34).

The final three categories appear initially not to correspond to certain characteristics of siege narrative but after closer investigation key parallels can be identified. The principal character is non-human (Leningrad itself), although the focus of personal siege testimonies certainly concerns human experience. Yet the two settings of time and place seem to preclude any exact fit between Bascom's definition of myth and siege biographies.

A myth, according to Bascom takes place in a remote time and in an 'earlier or other world'. Legends take place in the recent past and reflect the 'world as it is today'. According to these definitions the siege of Leningrad seems to attain the character of a legend rather than a myth. Of course, it is possible to see the limitations of Bascom's assertion that myth only takes place in the remote past by referring to T.S Eliot, Barthes, Benjamin and contemporary myth theorists who have identified not only the persistence of myth but its relevance to the 'world as it is today'¹⁰¹.

Nevertheless, the extraordinary conditions and daily experiences which define and shape siege memory cannot be a reflection of the 'world as it is today'. They are a reflection of a world 'made strange' and of a city landscape transformed into a white apocalypse¹⁰². Elena Vishnevskaja recalled that the city was shrouded in 'frozen silence' while Ol'ga Rozanova simply exclaimed '*Vy ne predstavlaete!*' or 'You just could not imagine it!'¹⁰³. The impact of this sensory *ostranenie* or *estrangement* from reality makes these recollections seem distinctly remote from the present day.

¹⁰¹ Refer also to David Gervais, 'The persistence of myth...'.
¹⁰² See also Jostein Bortnes, 'Viktor Shklovskij, or the Rhetoric of Strange-Making',
Scando-Slavica, 39 (1993), 5-22.

¹⁰³ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 7. BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p.2.

In addition, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the changing of the city's name have dislocated *blokadniki* from their pasts. Perhaps if the Communist system had prevailed and the Soviet Union was still in existence, this past would not appear so distant.

Correspondingly, by returning to these memories survivors are often re-visiting a set of beliefs which no longer correspond to the dominant ideology of the day (that being free market capitalist economics)¹⁰⁴. In this regard, the siege is closer to Bascom's definition of myth as opposed to legend.

The question of whether this epic tale is inherently sacred or secular is perhaps the most interesting and challenging of Bascom's definitions. Of course, the concept of the siege of Leningrad as a spiritual narrative directly contradicts the atheism promoted by Communist ideology. During the course of the interviews it emerged that the topic of faith was a particularly sensitive one for *blokadniki*. Tat'iana Letenkova was one of only a small minority of respondents who was adamant that there had been a considerable resurgence in faith and in church attendance during the siege¹⁰⁵.

Nevertheless, Svetlana Gachina and Tat'iana Goncharenko recalled that *babushki* and uncles and aunts attended religious services during the siege. Gachina even stated that she came from a religious family. Yet, she was careful to assert that she herself had rejected Christianity and that by her teens she was already a committed atheist¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ This process also echoes Walter Benjamin's identification of commemorative events as being encounters, 'with an earlier life'. Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire...* pp. 184-85.

¹⁰⁵ For the importance of the church during the siege see also Valerii Lianin, '*U nikh Ostavalas' Tol'ko Nadezhda, Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine*' <www.world-war.ru> [accessed 17/10/2005].

¹⁰⁶ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 11. BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, transcript, p. 12.

All these factors point towards a master narrative which is inherently secular in character yet it is through their attitudes towards their own stories and the meanings that they derive from them that *blokadniki* reveal a sacred subtext. They may not generally regard themselves as being religious or superstitious but the experiences they relate are nevertheless coloured with sacred resonances and significations.

Bascom places the categories of sacred and secular in correlation with attitude. A myth, legend or folktale can be either secular or sacred depending on the attitude of the person telling the story. For Viktor Lodkin the essence of blockade sacrality was expressed in the number of casualties¹⁰⁷. The retired workers at the *Elektrosila* plant stressed a kind of sacred union which existed between them and their superiors. Lidiia Blagodarova exclaimed 'If there had not been a canteen here in this factory we would not have been here today'¹⁰⁸. Consequently, an aura of sacrality emerges through the dynamics of human relationships and through attitudes towards colleagues, friends, family and city.

This sense of sacred bonds creates an aura of nostalgia around siege testimony. *Blokadniki* are of course not nostalgic about the suffering they endured but they are nostalgic about aspects of their community. Svetlana Boym identifies this nostalgia as one defined by common goals. She identifies a culture of mourning for an era when 'all the nuts and bolts' were held in place. This was defined by 'an ideological and aesthetic system that offered a clear "road to life"'¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Lidiia Blagodarova, *Elektrosila* plant, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, p. 244.

Of course, as Wendy Slater reminds us we should be wary of fitting certain narratives 'into deterministic ahistorical interpretive schemes, such as "Russians reverting to type" (sentimental, anti-Semitic, chauvinistic)...',¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, the path to a 'road of life' outlined by Boym clearly has religious connotations. Stalinist ideology was very adept at absorbing sacred rhetoric for its own ends. Therefore the sacral character of siege testimony is entirely consistent with the quasi-religious terminology deployed by Stalinist propaganda.

The process of sacralisation is also clearly underpinned by acts of commemoration. Clare Flanagan writes that 'We find myths of salvation, stories of national redemption, political saviors, figures to venerate, 'moral' and ethical values, messengers of the truth, narratives held 'sacred'¹¹¹. Similarly, John Coakley informs us that sacred values become ingrained in the collective psyche through ritualisation. He identifies 'processions, parades, marches...commemorations... and other public ceremonials that serve to remind people vividly of their membership in a community existing over time'.

These rituals utilise a reservoir of symbols such as 'flags, anthems, and emblems, but also public monuments and buildings...and such everyday phenomena as place names, military uniforms' and other nostalgic paraphernalia¹¹². Consequently, sacred narrative does not just describe the siege as a whole but individual objects,

¹¹⁰ Wendy Slater, 'Relics, Remains, and Revisionism: Narratives of Nicholas II in Contemporary Russia', *Rethinking History*, 9.1 (March 2005), 53-70 (p. 67).

¹¹¹ Clare Flanagan, 'Political Myth and Germany 1945-49' (p. 122).

¹¹² John Coakley, 'Mobilizing the Past: Nationalist Images of History', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 10:4 (Winter 2004), 531-60 (pp. 534-35).

places, sights, sounds and smells associated with siege life. It resonates across the entire mythological topography of besieged Leningrad.

Kelley E. Rowley states that the 'Mythopoetic vision is a view of existence that creates identity and community. In this broad sense, mythopoetic 'vision is a way of becoming whole, of affirming ones' special place in the universe, and myth, song, and ceremony are ways of affirming vision's place in the life of all people'¹¹³.

If one adopts Rowley's model then myth can be seen as a creator of communities. At the time of the interviews in 2003 this sense of occupying a 'special place' in the world was underlined by respondents who had very recently taken part in a medal awards ceremony marking the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg.

Commemorative events also confirm Benedict Anderson's assertion that the 'imagined' community is defined above all by 'a deep, horizontal comradeship'¹¹⁴.

Confrontation with one's own mortality and the proximity of death also bring siege narrative into the realm of eschatological myth. Harrison Salisbury consciously described the besieged city as the 'Leningrad apocalypse'¹¹⁵. Surviving this frozen apocalypse became a right of passage and for the Kolpino veterans life lived near the front line was particularly fragile.

¹¹³ Kelley E. Rowley, 'Re-inscribing Mythopoetic Vision...' (pp. 494-95).

¹¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso editions and NLB, 1983), p. 7.

¹¹⁵ Harrison Salisbury, 'The Leningrad Apocalypse' in *The 900 days...*, pp. 473-83.

Adamovich and Granin state that 'There still exists among *blokadniki* the knowledge that human potential is boundless and it is this quality which they value so deeply'¹¹⁶. They then go on to quote the words of Pavel Philippovich Gubchevskii: 'Shells? Well, they were everywhere. Bombs? They were everywhere. Hunger?... Death? They were all around us...Yet, the blockade - it is above all about humanity. The human being is complex. The power behind this, obviously finds its essence in various assertions about the blockade, but *blokada* is above all - about dependence on the ingenuity of each individual....People gained a sense of completeness...I felt as though a breakthrough happened within me, a kind of liberation... For me now there was one task: to find a greater purpose in life...this was something I could not have put into practice earlier'¹¹⁷. This sense of a *tsel'*, an aim, a target or a sense of purpose echoes Gachina's statement above that they had faith in what they were doing. This, in turn gave them an internal feeling of *tselnost'*, completeness, or integrity.

In summary, the epic story of the siege generally fits Bascom's definition of myth. Yet, the term sacred narrative is more appropriate and precise as a means of depicting the essential qualities of siege testimony. Myth and ritual combine through commemorative events which reify a sacred past. The memory of that past is conjoined with beliefs about the depths of the human spirit and the path to *agnorisis* or personal discovery which this 'historic mission' brought with it.

¹¹⁶ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 67-68.

Michel Maffesoli identifies this process as ‘an *immanent transcendence* that is constituted by the feeling of belonging, by shared passion or by a quasi-mystical sense of correspondence to one’s surroundings’¹¹⁸. The sacred power of siege recollections emerges through shared experience of what it is like to ‘live one’s death in the everyday, to confront it, and to assume it’¹¹⁹. Myth itself gives definition and clarity to our pasts while its function never diminishes. As N.Wyatt succinctly states ‘myth remains obstinate. Even apparently outvoted, it will not go away, and returns again and again to haunt us’¹²⁰.

¹¹⁸ Michel Maffesoli, ‘Everyday tragedy and creation: Translated from the French by Karen Isabel Ocaña’, *Cultural Studies*, 18.2/3 (March/May 2004) 201-10 (p. 204).

¹¹⁹ Michel Maffesoli, ‘Everyday tragedy...’ (p. 207).

¹²⁰ N. Wyatt, ‘The Mythic Mind...’ (pp. 8-9).

‘ZA RODINU! ZA STALINA!’

MYTHS OF PATRIOTISM IN CONTEMPORARY SIEGE TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters *In Defence of Myth: the Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative* and *Oral Testimony and the Veracity of Long-term Memory* parallels were drawn between myth theory and recent research conducted in the field of oral history. Particular attention was given to the concept of officially designated ‘master-narratives’ and how these proscribed versions of historical experience either overlap with or are contradicted by individual recollections. The latter often constitutes what can be termed ‘the Other’s side of the story’¹. It was also stated that myth can be subversive and resistant to these master-narratives and that it can give voice to the ‘silenced other’².

There is arguably no single topic in siege testimony which elicits more tension between master-narratives and individual belief-systems than that of patriotism. This tension is often intensified in countries governed by totalitarian regimes such as that of Stalin’s Russia where the dissemination of information was closely monitored and tailored to fit the needs of state propaganda. Patriotism is in turn closely linked to ideology and aspects of identity and has often been blurred with notions of nationalism.

¹ Joan Wallach Scott, ‘History in Crisis: The Other’s Side of the Story’, (pp. 680-692).

² M. Charlene Ball, ‘Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction/Tracing Arachne’s Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction’, *NWSA Journal*, 16:2 (Summer 2004), 229-233 (p. 229).

Patriotism, is similar to myth in that it represents a vortex of slippery meanings and associations which continue to be a source of conflict and debate. Yet, it lies at the heart of mythopoetic narrative during times of national crisis and war and if feelings of patriotism cannot be engendered effectively among the populace at these times the result can be potentially disastrous for any military campaign.

The following discussion attempts to present contemporary debates surrounding the themes of patriotism and ideology in order to provide *blokadnikis*' statements on this topic with a wider context. Particular attention is given to the oscillation between universalism and particularism and to the selection of theoretical frameworks which most aptly suit the complexities of notions of patriotism and ideology within siege narrative.

As demonstrated below particularism functions on a variety of different levels and does not necessarily simply connote loyalty to nation or *ethnos* which is often associated with darker aspects of nationalism and chauvinism. Particularism can also be embodied by loyalty to one's city, family and local surroundings. If individuals are faced with the annihilation of their families and local environments by an alien aggressor then patriotism can arguably have a profound moral basis³.

In times of crisis the concepts of universal brotherhood and membership of humanity as a whole as represented ultimately by universalism, though admirable sentiments,

³ Hitler issued the following directive concerning 'The Future of the City of St. Petersburg' headed: '1. The Fuhrer has decided to raze the City of Petersburg from the face of the earth'. Leningraders subsequently faced a stark choice between victory or annihilation. See also Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 350-52 (High Command Order no.44 1675/41).

are often not enough to engender a willingness towards self-sacrifice.

Particularism can, on the other hand, when it is not coupled with notions of exclusion and racial superiority be a positive and a necessary force. Consequently, the binary opposition of universalism and particularism oversimplifies definitions of the functional aspects and potential of patriotism.

Veit Bader informs us that the post-nationalist debate has brought the concept of 'cosmopolitanism' to the fore⁴. Writers such as Martha Nussbaum regard cosmopolitanism as a means of asserting 'universal values of justice and right' which are subverted by nationalist rhetoric⁵. Universalism replaces particularism through regarding us not as members of a given *ethnos* or nation but as 'citizens of the world'⁶. Yet, as Bader correctly notes this amounts to an 'ambiguous response to the problems of local chauvinism, exclusivity and nationalism'⁷.

As regards being a motivating factor for self-sacrifice during times of war Bader also notes that such universal concepts are 'too abstract'⁸.

There is also no doubt that the Leningraders' patriotic defence of their city was morally justifiable. As Bader goes on to state 'If patriotism leans towards even more local concerns of family, friends and defence of one's immediate home and environment then it can not only be morally justifiable but ironically this

⁴ Veit Bader, 'Review: For Love of Country', *Political Theory*, 27.3 (June 1999), 378-397 (pp. 388-89).

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, Martha Nussbaum with Respondents, edited by Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 1996), pp. 4-5.

⁶⁻⁸ Bader, 'Review: For Love of Country...' (p. 389).

enhanced particularism reflects universal values of justice and right without vague references to universalism'. Bader regards the defence of family and friends as a deeper source of inspiration than that of 'membership of the community of human beings'⁹.

Nevertheless, within the context of siege testimonies it is not possible to dismiss universalist values as lacking motivation. Soviet ideology deliberately disseminated universalist values under the umbrella of Socialist brotherhood. In a vast territory such as the Soviet Union consisting of numerous different ethnic groups and republics, any incitement towards local nationalisms and chauvinistic tendencies could have been potentially fractious and counter-productive.

In 1941 the Soviet regime was clearly placed under threat. Subsequently, much has been made of both Stalin's temporary mental collapse following Hitler's assault on the Soviet Union and of the regime's retreat away from Marxist propaganda during wartime¹⁰. One notable example of this was Stalin's speech on Revolution Day in November 1941 where he attempted to draw inspiration from the 'brave example of our great ancestors, Aleksandr Nevskii, Dmitrii Donskoi,

⁹ Bader, 'For Love of Country...' (p. 389).

¹⁰ Simon Sebag Montefiore quotes Stalin's outburst during the opening days of the war when he exclaimed that 'Everything's lost. I give up. Lenin founded our state and we've fucked it up'. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. 330.

Kuz'ma Minin, Dmitrii Pozharskii, Aleksandr Suvorov, and Mikhail Kutuzov'¹¹.

As Serhii Iekelchyk states this list was 'Notable for the absence of revolutionaries and Civil War icons, this list of Russian princes, defenders of the monarchy, and tsarist military leaders seems to have provided the multinational Soviet state with a single heroic past with which to identify – the familiar Russian tsarist historical mythology'¹². Russian patriotism was also presented 'within the ideological framework of the "friendship of peoples"'¹³.

This gave Communism an ethical basis as the Soviet people became part of what Luke March has referred to as the 'moral community of believers'¹⁴.

Nevertheless, the interviews conducted for this study demonstrate that *blokadniki* appear today to stress particularist concerns over universal ones. They are adamant that this struggle was primarily about defence of city, family and friends. Though a deep connection with the image of Stalin emerges, ideology itself appears to have little resonance for veterans. Yet the manner in which they express themselves and the vocabulary which they deploy reveal that their earlier ideological belief-systems are still very much intact. Consequently, a gap appears between assertions that ideology was not relevant during the siege, and the style and substance of rhetoric which is clearly coloured by Stalinist ideology. This gap can

¹¹ Serhii Iekelchyk, 'Stalinist Patriotism as Imperial Discourse: Reconciling the Ukrainian and Russian "Heroic Pasts", 1939-1945, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 3.1 (Winter 2002), 51-80 (p. 51).

¹² Serhii Iekelchyk, 'Stalinist Patriotism ...' (p. 51).

¹³ Serhii Iekelchyk, 'Stalinist Patriotism ...' (p. 51).

¹⁴ Luke March, 'For Victory? The Crises and Dilemmas of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53.2 (March 2001), 263-90 (p. 265).

be explored through the concept of non-intentional meaning which accurately describes these two apparently contradictory processes at work within siege testimony.

NON-INTENTIONAL MEANING

Discussing the theme of patriotism is not without its pitfalls. Ideology, for the older generation remains a thorny topic. As demonstrated below, *blokadniki* respond to these themes in a variety of ways and sometimes the content of their narratives contradicts earlier valedictory statements. This process can also be termed non-intentional meaning. Consequently, their initial responses may come to seem almost reflexive and defensive because they are uncomfortable with the idea of confronting questions of ideology directly. This was certainly the case with Aleksandra Arkhipova and Ol'ga Rozanova who initially dismissed the relevance of Soviet identity during the siege yet later in the discussion gave detailed descriptions of what Soviet identity meant for them. This concurs with Gabriele Rosenthal's observation that respondents often 'get caught up in the narrative current of their story'¹⁵. It is at this point that their true ideological beliefs can come potentially to the surface of the dialogue.

¹⁵ *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, edited by Gabriele Rosenthal, pp. 243-44.

Patrick Colm Hogan isolates four different types of non-intentional meaning: social, autonomous, essentialist, and representational. 'Social meanings are the meanings of Language insofar as it is understood to exist as a "social object". Autonomous meaning 'is conceived of as part of an extraintentional, sometimes even counterintentional, abstract linguistic system'. Essentialism is 'the position that the meaning of a referential term is given in the essence of the object to which it refers' while representation is a 'mentalistic theory of language or speech which is unintentional'¹⁶.

Non-intentional meaning helps identify the different layers present in patriotic discourse. This is particularly helpful because veterans often make ideological statements even when the topic of discussion does not apparently relate to either patriotism or ideology. Patriotism, alongside memory of the senses and myth production is an agency which stabilises the overall dynamic of siege narrative. Patriotism is also separate from other topics in siege testimony in that it does not converge around a single event or place. It is a reflection of attitude, and as such can be present at any time during the dialogue.

The following quote given by Lidiia Smirnova charts her own experiences but also deploys highly patriotic language. Here, and at other points in her narrative she blends personal recollections with wartime slogans and ideological

¹⁶ Patrick Colm Hogan, *On Interpretation: Meaning and Inference in law, psychoanalysis, and literature* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996) p. 151.

statements. In fact she utilises wartime propaganda as a means of conveying her own story. This is an example of contractual patriotism whereby the patriotic urges of the state resonate with the concerns of the people¹⁷.

As she recalls the winter of 1941 Smirnova stated that ‘Mama died. Father died of hunger. My little brother was three years old. He died as well. After the war I was left with one sister. Kolpino had a terrible time. We were absolutely surrounded by the Germans. But, the local battalions, can you imagine? Young women and men went to attack. They did “Everything for the Front. Everything for Victory!”’¹⁸

This statement was provided before Smirnova was asked any questions and in it she sought simply to give an account of her own experiences. Yet, the phrase “Everything for the front! Everything for Victory!” (*Vse dlia fronta! Vse dlia Pobedy!*) was one of the key propagandist slogans of the war. Thus personal recollections are coloured by the terminology of her youth.

Smirnova and her compatriots live in Kolpino, which is situated to the south of St. Petersburg. In 1941 Kolpino was close to the front and these veterans not only suffered great personal loss but witnessed at first hand German attacks which did not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Correspondingly, wartime propaganda which portrayed Fascism as a pernicious phenomenon soon gained credence as Smirnova and her friends experienced the chaos and

¹⁷ See also Melinda Lawson, “A Profound National Devotion”: The Civil War Union Leagues and the Construction of a New National Patriotism’, *Civil War History*, 48. 4 (December 2002), 338-62 (p. 340).

¹⁸ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 11.

terror which ensued as a result of the shelling. At the same time, they clung on to the certainties expressed by Soviet propaganda. As Anna Sorokina stated 'You listened to Stalin's speeches on the radio and afterwards you just felt better'¹⁹.

Smirnova was also proud of the fact that they worked despite the reality that they were all still effectively children at the time. Her activities in the factory and later in a local battalion which aided wounded and dystrophic civilians instilled in her a belief that her generation was committed to the cause and that above all that they were properly organised. This pride in organisation was expressed most passionately when she recalled the spring of 1942. 'Why? Why do you think there was not an epidemic? Because we cleaned up the streets and the snowdrifts full of corpses!'²⁰.

It should also be stated that non-intentional meaning emerges from the body language of *blokadniki*. Lidiia Smirnova was a notable example. She stood tall, raising her voice and spoke with almost uncontrollable passion. At the same time her narrative was strewn with propagandist phrases. From the outside it appeared to be a recitation made very much in the style of the kind of speeches she would have heard during her youth. Thus her recollections of wartime were also a re-presentation of belief-systems formed during her formative years. While the intention was simply to recount her past, the style and content of her narrative and in particular the manner in which it

¹⁹⁻²⁰ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, pp. 17 and 12.

was presented helped underline her attachment to the ideology of the Communist era.

As patriotism has been identified as a meta-narrative within siege discourse it is important to establish what kind of patriotism characterises these testimonies. This is because patriotism, similar to myth, has often been loosely defined, particularly in relation to nationalism. Like myth it is also contested ground and within the Russian context it is a particularly controversial topic. The post-Communist era has opened up the possibility for the elderly generation to reject the ideology of their youth. The fact that in general they do not, means that these belief-systems are resistant to change. Yet it is possible that this belief is conjoined with feelings of nostalgia for their younger years. In this regard they are also seeking to protect aspects of their pasts from being rejected by the younger generations as simply part of the Stalinist era. Therefore, there appears to be a number of different dynamics operating in relation to this topic, dynamics which can be identified more precisely through applying the concept of non-intentional meaning.

Is their patriotism distinct from nationalism? In addition, how do *blokadniki* themselves apprehend these two terms? Is their idea of patriotism in any way related to contemporary patriotic movements in Russia and do they equate their own sense

of belonging and identity with assertions made by Russian politicians today? Do they consider themselves primarily to be Russians or do they still regard themselves as Soviet citizens? Does the name of St. Petersburg hold any relevance for them in comparison with that of Leningrad, a name which will forever be associated with the siege? Finally, if we can identify accurately the constituent components of their patriotic statements and define what kind of patriotism retains most resonance for them today, how does this shed light on contemporary debates surrounding Russian nationalism, identity and patriotism?

1812 AND 'IMAGINING' THE NATION

The wartime propaganda that influenced these veterans so profoundly drew upon historical associations from Russia's past, in particular that of the Great Patriotic War of 1812. This myth of origin has been displaced in contemporary siege testimony by the blockade itself but at the time it defined that sense of contractual patriotism between the state and its citizens which Stalin sought to evoke.

Above all, as Sorokina states in her recollection of the cleaning up of the city in the spring of 1942 a sense of participation, clear goals and progress engendered patriotic spirit. Sorokina's statements are a reflection of the success of wartime propaganda which strove to portray a struggle which brought the state and populace together. She did not perceive any difference between her own

goals and that of the government, and 1812 provided the most notable example in Russian history of a similar convergence of common interests.

War and Peace according to Soviet commentators was primarily a tale about, 'two moral-psychological planes of representation...the sphere of falsehood in the life and consciousness of the aristocracy' and 'the sphere of truth in the life and consciousness of the simple people'²¹. This moral triumph was defined along class lines, emphasising the superiority of the *narod* (people) over *znat'* (aristocracy)²². The Russian interpretation of the significance of 1812 also demonstrated a predilection for regarding history as story. As Svetlana Boym reminds us, in Russia 'the ties between historiography and literature have never been severed'. The Russian view of history is therefore an 'embodied intergeneric dialogue between fiction and history'²³.

Nevertheless, the most resonant aspect of the struggle against Napoleon was that it 'rendered the nation visible'²⁴. O.E Maierova writes that 'The memory of 1812 simultaneously represented ancient Rus' and Russia's imperial past and therefore could serve as a mythical foundation for a union of the people with the regime'²⁵.

²¹ A.A Saburov, "Viona i Mir", *L.N Tolstogo, Problematika i Poetika* (Moscow, 1959), p. 243.

²² R.F Christian, *Tolstoy's "War and Peace": A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 97.

²³ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, p. 240.

²⁴ O.E Maierova, 'War as Peace: The Trope of War in Russian Nationalist Discourse during the Polish Uprising of 1863', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 6. 3 (Summer 2005), 501-34 (p. 516).

²⁵ O.E Maierova, 'War as Peace...' (p. 517). Cited also in Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford: Stanford UP, California, 1994), p. 13.

Vladimir Solonari also identifies similar characteristics in Soviet myths which were already propagated in the 1930's. 'The people "originates" ("derives" or "stems" — *proiskhodit*), "suffers" (from foreign domination), "fights" (for independence), and subsequently, "creates culture" ...as a proof of its dignity and creative might to the external world²⁶.

Evoking the ghosts of 1812 was extraordinarily successful. Lidiia Ginsberg notes this by stating that 'during the war years people read *War and Peace* voraciously... anyone who had the strength read *War and Peace* in besieged Leningrad... Tolstoy always wrote about courage, and about man, communal activities and the 'people's war'²⁷.

1812 was even used in Britain as a means of instilling a sense of shared goals with the Soviet Union. A new edition of *War and Peace* appeared in 1942 and propagandist booklets such as *Russia: Britain's Ally* deliberately re-invoked the Napoleonic wars²⁸. Nevertheless, though the persistence of myth has already been underlined in the chapter focusing upon myth theory this does not exclude the potential for certain myths to fade away and be replaced in turn by new ones. What is striking is that

²⁶ Vladimir Solonari, 'Creating a "People": A Case Study in Post-Soviet History-Writing', *Kritika*, 4:2 (Spring 2003), 411-38 (p. 418).

²⁷ Lidiia Ginzberg, *Zapisnye Knizhki Vospominaniia Esse, Zapiski Blokadnogo Cheloveka* (*Iskusstvo, Sankt Peterburg*, 2002), p. 611.

²⁸ Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1942). F.D Klingender, *Britain's Ally* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1942).

certain aspects of the myth of 1812 have now become defining characteristics of the story of the siege. The impression of social solidarity, the strengthening of communal bonds, and the belief that mutual suffering or *sostradanie* brought out an intrinsic Russian spirit which expressed itself through acts of self-sacrifice and *dushevnost'* (soulfulness). As Tat'iana Letenkova simply stated 'Leningraders had something special about them'²⁹.

1812 had been the first time that the aristocracy and peasantry had moved together in a national formation. Yet in time, the myth of 1812 would be dwarfed by the myth of the Great Patriotic War which has in turn become a central pillar of how Russia defines her past. Nevertheless, the essence of this patriotic narrative remains the same. Sorokina's focus upon organisation and collective duty echoes the unifying power of 1812 which 'enabled the "cultural project of imagining" the nation'.

Valerie Sperling identifies this process of 'imagining' the nation as a means of solving questions of identity within the Russian context. She identifies the myth of the Great Patriotic War as the common denominator between Russian and Soviet identity and regards it as 'the only surviving event around which today's Russian citizens (and not all of them) feel a bond'³⁰. This echoes a statement made by *blokadnik* Iurii Semeonovich that younger Russians for him do not have the same appreciation of deeper friendships³¹.

²⁹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p.11.

³⁰ Valerie Sperling, 'The last refuge of a scoundrel: patriotism, militarism and the Russian national idea: Nations and Nationalism', *Blackwell Publishing*, 9.2 (2003), 235-53 (p. 236).

³¹ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 15.

In essence, the myth of 1812 and the myth of the Great Patriotic War forged a contractual bond between the people and the state. This process is also reminiscent of Althusser's concept of 'hailing'. 'A successful hailing occurs if the individual recognises and accepts the hail. If a hailing is successful, an individual becomes a "subject" of a particular ideology, and, hence, is "interpellated"³².

The belief that communal bonds were strengthened during the siege echoes the refrain of 1812 that stressed common goals. The successful interpellation of the 1812 myth illustrated by Lidiia Ginzberg's observations led in turn to the creation of new patriotic myths. These unifying narratives retain resonance because they stress a heroic past which stretches across a complex multi-ethnic society. For this reason they remain an important part of the political discourse in Russia today.

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN NATIONALISM VERSUS THE WARTIME 'IMAGINED' COMMUNITY

The myth of 1812 defines patriotic statements made by *blokadniki* in relation to Russia's past. Yet how can we compare them to present patriotic discourse in Russia? While contemporary Russian political movements often seek to identify themselves with these heroic narratives the attempt at interpellation within this context often fails. Consequently, notable gaps emerge between the patriotism of war testimonies and declamations made by Russian

³² Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Louis Althusser (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 137.

politicians. These gaps also help us define further the essence of this war patriotism. What separates it most profoundly from contemporary Russian nationalism is that it belongs to a distinct 'imagined' community. Therefore, the only expressions of such patriotism which appear truly genuine to veterans are those made by members of this community. As demonstrated below, *blokadniki* appear to be confused by or even hostile towards the Russian nationalism of today.

The concept of the 'imagined community' was coined most notably by Benedict Anderson in his highly influential book: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Since its initial publication in 1983 and the appearance of a revised edition in 1991 the phrase 'imagined community' has become almost an unavoidable component of any contemporary debate covering aspects of patriotism, nationalism and identity³³. Yet, despite the abundance of recent discussions concerning Anderson's concept it remains a valuable tool for analysing issues of community, patriotism and identity. This is because it circumnavigates the 'Holy Trinity' of 'Race, Class, and Gender'³⁴. This is

³³ Ed White writes that 'The popularity and influence of this work first published in 1983, with a spectacular re-edition in 1991 - has been tremendous and unavoidable, with practically every study of the nation offering the obligatory and often oblique reference to 'imagined communities'... Ed White, 'Early American Nations as Imagined Communities', *American Quarterly*, 56. 1 (March 2004), 49-81(pp. 49-50). Anderson sets out his stall by stating that the nation is 'an imagined political community...It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p. 15.

³⁴ Ed White, 'Early American Nations...' (p. 49).

particularly useful as the western interpretation of class is quite distinct from the Russian experience. Anderson's statement that 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' is particularly relevant to this study³⁵.

The content of Lidiia Smirnova's comments has already been mentioned as a brief introductory example of how contemporary and wartime vocabularies intermingle. Aleksandra Arkhipova, when asked about contemporary Russian nationalism and in particular about the policies of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Zhirinovsky gave the following robust response: 'Well... Zhirinovsky...this has absolutely no relation to the mentality and the personal quality of people during the siege...this is something absolutely different. Everyone was focused on our victory...how could one live in those conditions without patriotism? What is this nationalism? Where is the difference between Armenian, Jewish or Russian? Nationalism appears when people are hostile towards one another... We were all in the same boat...Nationalism absolutely did not exist'³⁶.

Ol'ga Rozanova's statement is equally revealing: 'Before the war, and during the war we never separated people according to their nationality. Whether you were Tatar, Jewish, Uzbek or Kirghiz it did not matter. He was ours, he was a Soviet person. He was defending our country. We never separated people. We did not think about patriotism. We only thought about defending our city and making sure it did not fall to the Fascists'³⁷.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*... p. 15.

³⁶ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 12.

³⁷ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 10.

This passage also touches on aspects of ideology, namely, the foregrounding of Soviet citizenship as an overarching identity which dissolved social and ethnic boundaries. In reality, the Soviet government was very active in distinguishing different ethnic groups from one another and the wartime deportation of entire ethnic groups from the Caucasus was a notable example of these policies³⁸.

Nevertheless, for all the respondents the dissolution of difference and the concept of all 'being in the same boat' was a salient feature of these narratives.

Interviewed on Radio Svoboda, the veteran Irina Skripacheva made the following statement: 'We are the generation of the Great Patriotic War. We are not old people...this word 'elderly' is not applicable to us....We lived with great dignity and felt ourselves to be valued in life. But in the 1990's it seemed the government threw this all overboard. Well, that is the situation'³⁹.

Irina Efremova expressed her sense of belonging to a special group in the following terms: 'We were all prepared to fulfil our duties in defending the city. We were ready to work round the clock in order to help the front and the country. This I remember well...On the Sixtieth anniversary I would like to greet and congratulate my friends, with whom I worked in the factory, bringing victory closer with our own hands'⁴⁰.

³⁸ Montefiore states that for each of the peoples deported from the Caucasus the journey resulted in a tragedy which 'approached the Holocaust'. He estimates that over half a million perished en route to the east. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, p. 419.

³⁹ Radio Svoboda, *Temy Dnia* (1 October 2004) <radiosvoboda.org> [accessed 2/06/2006].

⁴⁰ 'Ofitsial'nyi sait zakonodatel'no sobranie, Sankt-Peterburga ustav S-PBvis' <www.assembly.spb.ru>, [accessed 28/08/2005].

Skipacheva's statement is notable for its emphasis upon the unique identity of her generation. Her rejection of the words denoting old age, *stariki*, *starushki* and *pozhiloe* reflects a belief that this generation cannot be given the usual labels. They are special, and should be valued as such. They are not 'old' but are the generation of the Great Patriotic War. In that sense, by defying concepts of old age they become almost eternal in the minds of survivors⁴¹.

The myth of community is therefore a central facet of *blokadnikis'* sense of patriotism. It reminds them that they are a part of a special group. As Anderson states, they cannot know *all* the members of this community but when they come together there is an unspoken and shared comprehension of what it means to have lived through the 900 days. In Anderson's words 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'⁴².

A brief survey of some of the current trends in contemporary Russian nationalism also sheds light upon why *blokadniki* might seek to distance themselves from these political movements. Contemporary Russian nationalism consists of a simulacra of various historical, political, ethnic and religious themes leading to an overall picture of confusion and fragmentation. This tossed salad of expedient and often incongruous images is contrasted by the clarity with which *blokadniki* appear to define their own belief-systems. In addition, there are certain themes in

⁴¹ Skipacheva's sentiments echo Laurence Binyan's famous lines: 'They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn'. *For the Fallen*, 1914. See also Robert Giddings, *The War Poets: The Lives and Writings of the 1914-18 War Poets* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1990).

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*... p. 15.

contemporary Russian nationalism which many veterans would arguably find difficult to identify with, most notably Fascist and religious symbolism.

For example, the religious movement *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo* or Russian National Unity and its focus upon what it terms the 'Jewish question' contradicts the recurring theme in Aleksandra Arkhipova and Ol'ga Rozanova's testimonies of togetherness and the dissolution of ethnic differences. Articles such as M. Nazarov's: 'Ways and Possibilities of Resolving the Jewish Question' and P. Grubakh's: 'A Critique of the Accusation of anti-semitism: The Moral and Political Foundations for a Critique of Jewry' exploit a series of emotive themes. Nazarov equates the word 'oligarch' with 'Jewish' and in turn with 'satanism' which seeks to 'murder the orthodox soul of the people'⁴³. Grubakh often places anti-semitism in inverted commas, referring to it as an artificial construct⁴⁴. The Jewish people are perceived as a threat from within and without. Nazarov refers to the 'Bolshevik genocide' and the 'Bolshevik Jew' in the same sentence while for Grubakh there is a clear linkage between Russian Jews and the external and therefore pernicious influence of American Jewry.

Julia Sudo informs us that Russian nationalist Orthodoxy theology has even reached further extremes through propagating 'a rational, cynical approach to

⁴³ M. Nazarov, 'Puti i sposoby resheniia evreiskogo voprosa, Vserossiiskoe Obshchestvennoe Patrioticheskoe Dvizhenie', *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo* <www.rne.org> [accessed 7/01/2006].

⁴⁴ P. Grubakh, Kritika 'Obvineniia v antisemitizme: moral'nye i politicheskoe osnovaniia dlia kritika evreistva', *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo* <www.rne.org> [accessed 7/01/2006].

Christianity which creates the image of the Saviour as of a Russian Jesus who comes to save the Russian Orthodox people from their non-Russian and non-Orthodox oppressors'⁴⁵. Sudo also identifies these religious trends as attempting to substitute a sense of 'loss of religion' following the fall of Communism⁴⁶.

For the National Bolshevik Party which blends both Fascist and Communist imagery it is Putin himself who is the main protagonist in a perceived plot to destroy Russia. Again the question of 'otherness' is foregrounded. In an article purporting to give a *Psychological Portrait* of Putin, we are reminded that Putin comes from St. Petersburg. The name Putin 'sounds strange to the Russian ear' because it is in fact derived from the French 'Poutine'. Yet Putin is also linked with 'Ras-Putin' who of course was perceived as a malevolent influence upon the Russian royal family⁴⁷.

Other nationalist movements such as the National-Republican Party of Russia and the Social-Patriotic Movement *Derzhava* emphasise centralisation and unity. For the NRPR the restoration of a vast military-industrial complex is paramount. The party seeks to restore what it terms Russia's 'natural borders' and states that Russia requires an army capable of thwarting all external threats, whether from NATO, China or the United States⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Julia Sudo, 'Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology: A New Trend in the Political Life of Russia', *Political Theology*, 6.1 (2005), 67-86 (p. 83).

⁴⁶ Julia Sudo, 'Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology...' (p. 67).

⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin, '*Psikhologicheskii Portret*', *Ofitsial'nyi sait Natsional-Bol'shevistskoi Partii*, <nbp-info.ru> [accessed 16/03/2003].

⁴⁸ '*Sotsial'no-Patrioticheskoe Dvizhenie "Derzhava"* <www.nns.ru/parties/derzh.html> 6 September 1999 [accessed 7/01/2006], '*Natsional'no-Respublikanskaia Partiia Rossii*' <www.nns.ru/elects/documents/nrprpr.html>, 6 September 1999 [accessed 7/01/2006].

Vladimir Zhirinovsky and The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia's call to arms is somewhat more vague. He asserts that it is no longer necessary to die under the banner of Islam, Fascism or Communism. All that is needed is the protection and development of Russian statehood although this is also combined with imperialist designs to expand Russian territory⁴⁹.

Efforts to interpellate a renewed sense of Russian patriotism have also been a concern of mainstream political parties. The Communist Party continues to attempt to reassert the relevance of Soviet patriotism and identity in the new era. A meeting in October 2001 declared its central aim to be the reaffirmation of Soviet patriotism 'not as memory of the past but as the foundation of our unity today'⁵⁰. The report from the meeting refers to the Soviet people in the present tense and states that the KPRF should become the prime representative of Soviet patriotism⁵¹.

Vladimir Putin has identified a malaise of dwindling national pride which needs to be reversed. Irina Voitsekh in her article: *The Young are Compelled to Love the Motherland and One Another* discusses premiere Mikhail Fradkov's proposal to introduce a bill entitled: *The Patriotic Education of the Citizens of*

⁴⁹ Vladimir Zhirinovsky, LDPR, 'Idiologiia' <www.ldpr.ru> [accessed 4/01/ 2006].

⁵⁰ KPRF, 'Sovetskii Patriotizm – Ne tol'ko pamiat' o proshlom, no osnova nashego splocheniia sevodnia', *Material'ny Mitinga*, 7 October 2001 <hhh17.narod.ru/M71001.HTM>, 6 September 2002, [accessed 7/01/2006]. See also 'K diskusii o patriotizme' <komsomol.narod.ru/national/Yakushev_on_patriotism.htm>, 15 March 2005 [accessed 7/01/2006].

⁵¹ KPRF, *Sovetskii Patriotizm...*

the Russian Federation from 2006-2010. Voitsekh informs us that 500 million rubles have been set aside for the implementation of this project⁵².

In general, Russian contemporary nationalism appears to reflect a sense of loss, confusion and fear. Parties such as *Russkoe Natsiol'noe Edinstvo* and the National Bolshevik Party accuse the government of being under the influence of non-Russian interests. Even Putin's own Russian identity is called into question. For the Communist Party it is a desperate attempt to restore feelings of Soviet patriotism, while for Putin's administration instilling a vague sense of patriotic duty appears to suffice.

This brief analysis of Russian nationalism today is given with the intention of distinguishing the patriotism of the Great Patriotic War generation from contemporary manifestations of national pride. Recent issues such as Russia's loss of status and territory were not a reality for the generation that witnessed the Soviet Union's victory over Fascism. By returning to the comfort of their 'imagined' community veterans can therefore express different patriotic beliefs which are based upon lived experience of a previous era. This particular manifestation of patriotism is something outsiders can neither share nor participate in. It is also primarily nostalgic in character.

Vladimir Solonari has noted the persistence of certain beliefs among the older generation in Russia and has attempted to identify why they remain so resistant

⁵² Irina Voitsekh, '*Politika: Molodykh zastaviat liubit' Rodinu i drug druga*, 20 July 2005 <www.utro.ru/articles/2005/07/20/459946.shtml> [accessed 7/01/2006].

to change. He states that during the 1930's (the period in which the majority of surviving *blokadniki* received their schooling) Soviet literature created 'highly rigid, formulaic texts containing a limited number of encoded cultural symbols, conveying an ideological message suitable to the authorities and readily understandable to the Soviet masses',⁵³.

Again, this is demonstrated most notably in *blokadnikis'* responses to questions about faith. Tat'iana Letenkova may have talked fondly about churches being reopened and of the opportunity of going to services but the majority concurred with Aleksandra Arkhipova who declared: 'Faith? Absolutely not. This was not our education. We were atheists',⁵⁴.

Solonari also asserts that the Soviet worldview 'exhibited remarkable resilience during the Soviet period and to a large extent survived the downfall of the Soviet Union',⁵⁵. The basic structure of Soviet narrative according to Solonari was therefore received and understood by the vast majority of the populace.

When asked about the relevance of Stalin's leadership as a source of inspiration Natalia Volkonskaia responded: 'There is a simple answer to this question and that is 100 percent'. Vladimir Gavrilov asserted that, 'Stalin. We believed in him'. Volkonskaia concurred: 'Stalin. This is a phenomenon',⁵⁶. Lidiia Firsova somewhat nostalgically maintained that 'I can say nothing bad about the old days in the factory',⁵⁷.

⁵³ Vladimir Solonari, 'Creating a "People"... (p. 413).

⁵⁴ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Solonari, 'Creating a "People"... (p. 413).

⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, pp. 11-12.

The certainties expressed by these *blokadniki* indicate that the unifying power of Stalin's image, for good or ill, has little in common with the fragmented political landscape of contemporary Russian nationalism. In a previous chapter a selection of quotes by younger generations of St. Petersburgers is cited. These quotes express a general sense of a loss of patriotic spirit during the 1990's and onwards. This feeling of 'flatness' has also been identified by Frederic Jameson as part of the postmodern condition⁵⁸.

David Palumbo-Liu defines it as a 'loss of historical mooring and the consequent loss of any foundation upon which to mount political life'⁵⁹. There are no longer 'hills or valleys to secure our geographies, no way to "map" a position...'⁶⁰ There is simply nothing to anchor identity, since no "story" obtains: no narrative can link up random events into a meaningful statement...Not only is history depleted of any weight, it becomes simply one "optional" narrative among many'⁶¹. This sense of a loss of mooring is contrasted by the statements made by *blokadniki* above which indicate that the interpellation of Soviet patriotism among the older generation remains surprisingly resilient.

In general, no contemporary strand of Russian nationalism or patriotism has succeeded in abating this general sense of 'flatness' among the younger

⁵⁸ Frederic Jameson stated that '[t]he breakdown of temporality suddenly releases this present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis'. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, USA: Duke University Press, 1991) p. 27. Cited also by David Palumbo-Liu, 'Awful patriotism: Richard Rorty and the politics of knowing', *Diacritics*, 29: 1 (Spring 1999), 37-56 (p. 51).

⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰ David Palumbo-Liu, 'Awful patriotism...' (p. 54).

⁶¹ David Palumbo-Liu, 'Awful patriotism...' (p. 51).

generation. This is because the various pleas for national unity, ethnic purity, territorial expansion and a return to Orthodox values are all competing and therefore optional narratives. In contrast, the myth of war, though it may be romanticised and tailored to suit contemporary concerns continues to exert an enduring appeal.

Catherine Merridale also notes the endurance of the myth of war by quoting a veteran who was contemptuous of efforts by today's politicians to anchor Russian identity in the Orthodox faith⁶². The old man dismisses them as '*podsvichni*', a word derived from *svechka* for candle. Aleksandra Arkhipova also mocked Russian politicians for their fake piety and false religiousness⁶³.

The 'imagined' community of veterans is distinguished by different sacral qualities which emanate from what Anderson terms a sense of 'moral grandeur' gained through acts of self-sacrifice for one's country. Anderson defines this as being distinct from other kinds of self-sacrifice in that it is 'fundamentally pure'⁶⁴.

Social imaginaries in this context are rooted in human sacrifice and experience; a mooring which renders contemporary Russian nationalism comparably rootless and fragmentary.

⁶² Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War...*, p. 326.

⁶³ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side B, transcript, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities...*p. 132.

THE CULTIVATION OF SACRED MEMORY

Claire Bond Potter has described a process whereby war elevates 'the cultivation of sacred memory to a preoccupation, particularly with the dead, but also with the cultural symbols that might remind a community--national or local--that the sacrifice of loved ones had transcendent meaning'⁶⁵. Stalin, as a cultural symbol is still associated with the war. Consequently, his image enters this pantheon of patriotic symbols which signify a glorious past.

The 'will-to sacrifice' also distinguishes war patriotism from contemporary nationalist narratives. The *blokadniki* in this study regarded this will as exemplified by teenage girls and boys undertaking military duties of considerable danger. As the Kolpino veteran Natalia Rudina underlined, 'We did all this. We helped one another in order to give us faith that victory had to come'⁶⁶.

Meira Weiss reminds us that 'The will-to-sacrifice is hence inscribed in nationalism'. This is demonstrated in 'the semiotic embodiment of this ethos in various commemorative settings, such as the organization of military cemeteries, the political iconology of war memorials and the symbolism of rites of commemoration'⁶⁷. While *blokadniki* may reject Weiss's use of the word nationalism the 'will-to-sacrifice' forms a crucial part of their stories.

⁶⁵ Clare Bond Potter, 'Nation and Reunification', *Reviews in American History*, 28.1 (March 2000), 55-62 (p. 56).

⁶⁶ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Meira Weiss, 'The Body of the Nation: Terrorism and the Embodiment of Nationalism in Contemporary Israel', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 75.1 (Winter 2002), 37-62 (p. 39).

The Great Patriotic War itself belongs to the realm of sacred time. Participants describe their experiences through utilising ‘a privileged system of re-presentation’⁶⁸. As Ed White states, the imagination of such communities takes shape ‘through the medium of a sacred language and written script’⁶⁹. M. A Sorokina identifies some of the more well known refrains of this sacred vocabulary. Emotive phrases such as the ‘unknown soldier’ (*neizvestnyi soldat*), the ‘living and the dead’ (*zhivye i mertvye*), the ‘eternal flame’ (*vechnyi ogon*), the ‘victorious people’ (*narod-pobeditel*) and so on. She maintains that there is a vast gap between the myth’s ‘dramatis personae’ and the experience of real people and that ‘for decades a “national amnesia” (*‘obshchenatsional’noe zabvenie’*) would serve as an important element in the political stability of the Soviet regime’⁷⁰.

During one conversation with the author the vice-president of a veterans’ organisation stated that, ‘You have to understand. During *perestroika* there were all these revelations about Stalin. We found out about these terrible things. But that was in newspapers and on the radio. It was out there. The elderly do not remember it this way. They have a different picture of Stalin in their minds’⁷¹.

There is also an aspect of this ‘national amnesia’ which Sorokina perhaps overlooks in this article. The vice-president’s remarks indicate that the resilience of Soviet narratives is not simply a top down phenomena. Selective forgetting can occur both

⁶⁸ Ed White, ‘Early American Nations...’ (p. 51).

⁶⁹ Ed White, ‘Early American Nations...’ (p. 51).

⁷⁰ M. A. Sorokina, *People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR*, *Kritika*, 6: 4 (Autumn 2005) 797-831 (p. 801).

⁷¹ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 26.

at the highest levels and among ordinary individuals. In addition, Sorokina and Solonari note the resilience and tenaciousness of myths propagated during the Stalinist epoch. Sorokina even notes that the myth of war has been consolidated in the modern era⁷².

If such a vast gap did exist between the 'dramatis personae' of the myth of war and the experience of real people then this myth would not be able to persist. Myths cannot endure unless they are underpinned by a weight of common consent. In this sense, while stating that the myth of war is divorced from reality, yet at the same time noting its resilience, Sorokina overlooks the possibility that these Soviet myths are genuinely believed by many veterans. To remove them, is to undermine the integrity of the 'imagined' community itself.

Nevertheless, a significant minority of *blokadniki*, such as Tat'iana Letenkova do not hold such a reverential attitude towards Stalin. They do though still stress the importance of belonging to a special generation. Therefore, there remain key points of agreement concerning pride in the past.

As Ranjoo Seodu Herr states, 'The language that we use in various "interlocutions" with others is the language of a specific, historically embedded community, the members of which share a common culture that encompasses all meaningful aspects of human life'⁷³. Testimony consists both of conscious and unconscious

⁷² M. A. Sorokina, 'People and Procedures...' (p. 800).

⁷³ Ranjoo Seodu Herr, 'The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism', *Hypatia*, 18: 3 (Summer 2003), 135-60 (p. 139).

systems, the latter being governed by ‘parameters set by one’s culture, which is the main reservoir of available options’⁷⁴. These parameters define a series of overlapping imagined communities from, ‘family, neighborhood, tribe, village’ and city through to nation and empire⁷⁵. The belief that veterans belong to a sacred generation cuts across these parameters.

Harrison Salisbury observes that this belief became widespread soon after the war. He quotes the testimony of Zina Vorozheikina who was a seventeen-year-old student at the time. ‘All of us Leningraders are one family, baptized by the monstrous blockade - one family, one in our grief, one in our experience, one in our hopes and expectations’. Salisbury writes that, ‘Some even suggested that when the war ended Leningrad boys should marry only Leningrad girls - they had become a special breed, a special people’⁷⁶. This echoes a statement made by Ol’ga Rozanova that after the war when she had once visited the Ukraine she had been feted as a citizen of the ‘hero city’⁷⁷. Other *blokadniki* interviewed for this study who had been evacuated to places as remote as Kazakhstan and Siberia during the war related similar experiences.

Recent research conducted by Svetlana Magaeva, herself a survivor, suggests that there may be some physiognomic basis for beliefs that human behaviour was

⁷⁴ Ranjoo Seodu Herr, ‘The Possibility ...’ (p. 140).

⁷⁵ Ranjoo Seodu Herr, ‘The Possibility ...’ (p. 140).

⁷⁶ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 days...*p. 557.

⁷⁷ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 14.

somehow different during the siege. She states that 'What happened in Leningrad suggests that the human organism possesses reserve capabilities unknown to science that are manifested when the situation is extremely serious'⁷⁸. As a clinician in a hospital she witnessed the depth of the human spirit in situations where death seemed inevitable. She cites the case of Tania Utkina who survived despite being reduced to 'a walking skeleton' simply because she was determined to find her younger sister⁷⁹. On the other hand, a young girl called Olia had survived through focussing upon the need to care for her vulnerable younger brother. As soon as he died she began to fail. With 'nobody left in the world...she ceased to struggle against death'⁸⁰.

The perception that *sostradanie* opened up the soul and that people behaved differently during the war is a highly subjective one. Nevertheless, in extraordinary circumstances it can be expected that aspects of human behaviour will be affected. Even Tat'iana Letenkova who was in no way nostalgic for the days of the blockade underlined that 'People were very kind then'⁸¹.

Dale Pesmen in her book: *Russia and Soul: An Exploration* explores this theme. She recalls visiting a Russian home where she is shown a portrait of a relative of an old man who was killed in the Great Patriotic War. Pesmen tells us that while

⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹ Svetlana Magaeva, 'Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites for Survival and Recovery' in *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad, 1941-44*, 123-59, pp. 123 and 140.

⁸⁰ Svetlana Magaeva, 'Physiological and Psychosomatic Prerequisites...' (p. 140).

⁸¹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 12.

holding the portrait up to his chest the old man of the house declared ‘this is the true enigma of the Russian soul’ . The old man asserts that in the depths of the Russian soul there exists a profound patriotism as ‘closest to *dusha* is fatherland, birthplace, isn’t it?’⁸²

Pesmen goes on to state that ‘Great suffering as experienced during World War II unites the people and can temper and purify the soul’⁸³. This veteran recounts to Pesmen that even under Stalin and during the 1930’s people pulled together and helped one another; ‘*zhili byli*’ (once upon a time we lived)⁸⁴. She quotes another elderly man who laments that ‘even during World War II there were jokes, now nobody laughs’. She observed a sense of loss and a belief that there had been a collapse in morality and patriotism since the war when suffering united people and ‘souls opened’⁸⁵ .

Whether or not this generation possesses intrinsic qualities of character which made them more resilient during times of war is open to question. What is clear is that through participation in the cultivation of sacred memory veterans themselves perpetuate the myth that they are *homines sacri*. Again, baptised through suffering, they share a covenant of understanding.

Only *they* know what it was like to undergo such tribulation, and this fact alone is enough to make their generation special. Their spirit of patriotism emerges

⁸²⁻⁸⁴ Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul: An Exploration* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000), p. 44.

⁸⁵ Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul*...p. 39.

from collective memory of the 'will-to-sacrifice'. It is expressed above all by Arkhipova's statement that 'We were all in the same boat'⁸⁶. This is why contemporary Russian nationalism, with its clumsy mix of Fascist and Communist imagery is an anathema to the elderly generation.

⁸⁶ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 7.

PATRIOTISM PART II: CATEGORICAL IDENTITIES

The 'webs of interlocutions' cited above make the topic of patriotism a complex one within siege testimony. It is therefore necessary to separate some of these interlocking dialogues in order to examine the key components of *blokadnikis'* patriotism. Craig Calhoun provides a useful framework for identifying the persistence of certain rituals within communities and the symbols and codes they use to underline their sense of difference and special identity⁸⁷. He proposes a series of four categories: 1) Functional Interdependence 2) Categorical Identities 3) Direct Social Relations and 4) Publics.

1. Functional interdependence. This is based 'on various kinds of flows' which can be 'quasi-autonomous'. These flows join 'people in a mutuality'. Interestingly, Calhoun states that these are not necessarily products of human choices but can operate independently. Within this context these 'flows' might consist of verbal exchanges between veterans in which the content of the language reflects consciously or unconsciously the concerns of that particular generation.

Functional interdependence may also express itself through the formation of groups or societies and through gatherings and commemorative rituals where there is a quasi-autonomous flow of unspoken understanding concerning the nature and symbolism of these events. It is a system which binds *blokadniki* together through language and ritual.

⁸⁷ Craig Calhoun, 'Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere', *Public Culture, Society for Transnational Cultural Studies*, 14. 1 (Winter 2002), 147-71 (pp. 161-62).

Richard Slotkin notes that behind ‘the primary constituents of nationality’ lies mythology. Siege testimony, similar to ‘the mythology of the nation-state is a body of stories which vests this abstraction in the figurative flesh of representative heroes, embodying and exalting the character of ‘the People’. The central theme of patriotic discourse within siege narrative places great emphasis upon the wartime activities and character of ‘the People’⁸⁸. Slotkin also describes a ‘fictive ethnicity’ which binds the nation-state together. In the case of siege testimony this ‘fictive ethnicity’ is Soviet identity which traverses the boundaries of particularist ethnicities. The discussions exploring the ‘imagined’ community which exists between veterans have already charted how this functional interdependence operates.

2. *Categorical identities*. This could denote nation, or race, class or gender. This topic is discussed later in this chapter but is of particular interest within the Russian context. *Blokadniki* identify with a series of overlapping identities such as Soviet or Russian identity, pride in being a citizen of ‘Piter’ and/or of Leningrad and of belonging to a specific community such as the Jewish minority or other ethnic groups.

As Robert Bennett states patriotic fervour emerges ‘from partly instinctual feelings of identity and sense of place. In truth it can be both a natural essence and narrative construction and in times of war this discourse cannot be solely ‘transnational,

⁸⁸ Richard Slotkin, ‘Unit Pride: Ethnic Platoons and the Myths of American Nationality’, *American Literary History*, 13: 3 (Autumn 2001), 469-98 (p. 471).

pluralistic' and 'fragmentary' otherwise the narrative construction would not be empowered with a clear motivational force required in order to inspire self-sacrifice'⁸⁹. Bennett's theory therefore concurs with the view put forward here that particularism is a more potent force in times of crisis than universalism. Calhoun's second category will be examined in the most detail as the other three describe processes which have been explored earlier in this chapter.

3. *Direct social relations*. These create 'actual connections between people'.

This category is similar to functional interdependence in that shared language strengthens direct relations through mutual reliance upon one another. Direct relations can also consolidate and bolster popular myths and interpretations of the past which give veterans a sense of stability and continuity.

It should be remembered though that these narratives are also re-presentations of the past in a given light. According to Cairns Craig, 'forging a relation to the past through the present can conceal the brutal truth of our limited lives. The playful parenthesis of "were (are)" is significant; nations lay claims to a past (the "were") but have in fact only a present existence (an "are") of which the "were" is simply an illusion'⁹⁰. Direct social relations between survivors are a source of comfort but also a means of colouring the present 'are' with memories of how they 'were'.

⁸⁹ Robert Bennett, 'National allegory or carnivalesque heteroglossia? *Midnight's Children's* narration of Indian national identity', *Bucknell Review*, 43:2 (2000), 177-94 (pp. 177-78).

⁹⁰ Cairns Craig: 'Scott's Staging of the Nation', *Studies in Romanticism*, 40:1 (Spring 2001), 13-29 (p. 20).

4. *Publics*. 'Publics are self-organizing fields of discourse in which participation is not based primarily on personal connections and is always in principle open to strangers'. This relates to how siege survivors tell their own stories to outsiders. They may emphasise certain themes while downplaying others in order to convey a certain message.

Tat'iana Letenkova, Natalia Velezhova and Viktoriia Ruslanova politely deflected the question about the relevance of Stalin's image as a motivator for patriotic fervour. Letenkova recalled that 'Well, we had Zhdanov. I also remember Beria's speeches'⁹¹. But she did not confront the question directly. Natalia Velezhova stated, 'Everyone had these icons of Stalin in their homes. Well, of course Stalin achieved a great deal'⁹². Viktoriia Ruslanova asserted that 'Of course, the sense of patriotism was immense'. Yet, in response to the question about Stalin she stated enigmatically, 'Mama was a historian and she knew the real situation'⁹³. All three were much more comfortable with placing the theme of 'the People' centre stage.

In these instances the gaps in the dialogue were as instructive as the statements themselves. Although these three survivors were firmly in the minority they nevertheless still felt that the spirit of patriotism was 'immense'. Like the others they stressed above all their wartime allegiance towards their family, friends and their city. For Velezhova it was not Stalin but the sacrifices made by children that

⁹¹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 15.

⁹² BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 24.

⁹³ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, pp. 14 and 3 respectively.

defined the true spirit of patriotism. 'First of all, *all* the children were on duty protecting buildings. They helped the elderly and the wounded. Everyone worked for the country, the motherland, their home and their family'⁹⁴.

In general, particularist sentiments are automatically foregrounded over universalist ones. For some survivors such as Elena Skripacheva (see p.18), public relations also encompass efforts to shore up a sense of respect and care for the older generation which she clearly fears has been eroded. Nevertheless, as stated previously, this group of veterans did not feel in general that they had been treated unfairly by the present Russian administration. The veterans at the *Elektrosila* plant expressed gratitude to the government for a recent raise in their war pensions⁹⁵. Elena Vishnevskaja, showed me a card which was sent to *blokadniki* on a recent commemorative occasion. 'Look', she said. 'Putin signs every one!'⁹⁶

The statements about Stalin made by Letenkova, Ruslanova and Velezhova demonstrate the delicate nature of discussions 'open to strangers'. The interviews in Kolpino were quite different from the individual interviews because *blokadniki* were speaking in front of two *publics*, that of other veterans and the interviewee.

Individual interviews tended to be more open ended and intimate. Tat'iana Letenkova asserted that there was a clear difference between certain *blokadniki* who took part actively in organising clubs and commemorations and others who

⁹⁴ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 22.

⁹⁵ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 19.

⁹⁶ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 14.

were more reticent and preferred to remain outside these organisations. She had refused to accept invitations as she preferred to distance herself from the former group.

What is clear though, is that veterans' clubs create a supportive and comforting atmosphere which reasserts membership of this community. They are a crucial enabler for functional interdependence. Though it was noticeable that the group discussions began with quite declamatory statements these narratives quickly became more personal and relaxed. In both instances, the focus was very much on personal experiences rather than upon more general aspects of siege life. Thus, the presentation of personal experience is an overarching theme which defines the relationship between *blokadniki* and their publics. *Blokadniki* appear to get 'caught up' in their own narratives regardless of the setting⁹⁷.

CATEGORICAL IDENTITIES: 1) PITER/LENINGRAD

The first categorical identity which defines these patriotic narratives is that of being a Leningrader. This is not only a source of evident pride among *blokadniki* but is widely regarded by them to be something special and even revered. Yet, as discussed below the name St. Petersburg has much less relevance for the older generation than the titles of *Piter* and Leningrad. Leningrad represents their own past and upbringing while *Piter* denotes the wider history of St. Petersburg.

⁹⁷ See also Gabriele Rosenthal, 'National Socialism and antisemitism in intergenerational dialog', a chapter in, *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, 240-48, pp. 243-44.

St. Petersburg as a name is too closely associated with the post-Communist era and is therefore perceived to have less resonance than the other two.

Tat'iana Letenkova was the only respondent who openly rejected having any fondness for the name Leningrad. She asked, 'What did Lenin have to do with the history of this city?'⁹⁸ She also welcomed the return of pre-revolutionary street and place names. Letenkova regarded this as a proper restoration of St. Petersburg's identity. Titles such as *Proletarian Dictatorship Square* or *Soviet Street* now seemed quaint, even comical to her. Yet for many of the others the reinstatement of pre-revolutionary names seemed an affront to their pasts.

Aleksandra Arkhipova and Ol'ga Rozanova had mixed feelings about the Communist era but their pride in being Leningraders remained intact. Arkhipova stated that, 'I would like to say that Leningrad, is of course, not at all an ordinary provincial town...it is a great capital and it embodies the traditions of a great capital; a cultural and academic capital. This city is unique in the world...this is *Piter* not some provincial town like Kalinin... Stalin really did not like Leningrad and that also began with the story about Kirov...who became too great and Stalin participated in his murder...Later I received a medal '*Za Oboronnu Leningrada*' from Popkov... Popkov was shot and many others...This was the time of *Leningradskoe Delo* (The Leningrad affair)' ⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side B, transcript, p. 27.

⁹⁹ Piotr Sergeevich Popkov was the first secretary of *Gorkom* (the city committee) and *Obkom* (regional committee) from March 1946 until February 1949. Popkov was executed in 1950 but rehabilitated later. See also Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 583. BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 15.

Ol'ga Rozanova echoed these sentiments by stating that Leningrad was a unique city in that it had experienced three revolutions and not just one. Stalin was perceived as antagonistic towards Leningrad because the city was 'intellectual'. She portrayed the '*Sankt Peterburgskaia Intelligentka*' as a refined woman who was distinguished from other Russian citizens. She also stated that on her travels in other regions of the Soviet Union she had been perceived as having an elevated status. Leningraders were regarded as 'brighter' and 'purer' than provincial citizens. 'Leningraders were loved'. In relation to wartime patriotism she asserted that 'Our patriotism was simply for our city. We loved our city'¹⁰⁰.

Daniil Granin in his introduction to *Blokadnaia Kniga* is clear about what St. Petersburg represents for him. He discusses the 'Leningrad syndrome' whereby a city was 'torn to pieces by fear'. He encourages free thinking people to be brave and turn towards their European destiny as citizens of a city which looks westward. Yet, although a number of survivors in *Blokadnaia Kniga* stress the unity of the community during the siege, reference to the significance of being a Leningrader is generally absent¹⁰¹. *Blokadnaia Kniga* is valuable primarily as an account of lived experience during the 900 days, and in particular as a memory of the myths of everyday life. Though Granin himself makes a series of ideological statements during the opening and closing pages of the book, the testimonies themselves are almost entirely de-ideologised.

¹⁰⁰ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p.14.

There is no doubt though that contemporary testimonies make numerous references to what is often regarded as inherently special qualities possessed by Leningraders. According to Inga Petkevich, the blockade could never have been successful without the 'character and passion' of Leningraders. She asserts that strategies and tactics were an anathema to her. She also stressed that Leningraders' acclimatisation to harsh winters made them naturally more hardy and able to survive the winter of 1941-42¹⁰². Yet, compared with winter temperatures in many parts of Russia St. Petersburg's climate is not particularly extreme.

During the siege itself Lev Uspenskii was confronted by St. Petersburg's past history. Wearily carrying a bucket of water he passed by M. Mikeshein, M. Chizhov, and A. Opekushin's famous bronze statue of Catherine the Great. Amidst the horrors of the siege, this statue and the moored cruiser *Aurora* brought the significance of his city's history back to him¹⁰³. Past mythologies collided with the present. Yet, for Uspenskii Leningrad came subsequently to represent one thing, namely the siege itself. The blockade in his mind became a new myth of origins.

In *Blokadnaia Kniga* the historian Georgii Kniazev recalls that Leningrad's Egyptian sphinxes represented thousands of years of civilization which were now

¹⁰² Inga Petkevich, 'Svobodnoe Padenie'.

¹⁰³ The cruiser *Aurora* took part in the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-5 and most famously in both the February and October revolutions in 1917. See also <www.aurora.org.ru> [accessed 17/02/2006].

placed under threat by a world 'on fire'¹⁰⁴. Salisbury also writes of the poet Vissarion Saianov who, on hearing of the outbreak of war, thought of St. Petersburg past and present, and of Dostoevsky's 'city of fog and abyss...the bronze horseman in the marsh...the edge of Russia. It was Russia and it was not Russia'¹⁰⁵. Myth and memory have long been intertwined in depictions of St. Petersburg.

Salisbury's evocative description of the 'Leningrad apocalypse' is entirely in keeping with St. Petersburg's eschatological heritage. His chapters entitled 'The Leningrad apocalypse' and '"T" is for Tania' follow one another. The latter focuses upon the diary of Tania Savicheva, who like several of the veterans in Kolpino lost her entire family. Consequently, these personal apocalypses come to represent the suffering of Leningrad as a whole¹⁰⁶. St. Petersburg always bore an image which fired the mythopoetic imagination. In this regard the canonisation of the siege as sacred narrative was entirely consistent with the city's earlier history.

Nevertheless, the *blokadniki* interviewed for this study grew up in an era when 1917 was the defining myth of origin. The Soviet historian Nikolai Shumilov encapsulates

¹⁰⁴ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, '*Blokadnaia Kniga*', p. 271.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 89. Dostoevsky wrote evocatively of one wintry dusk in St. Petersburg when 'It seemed as if all that world, with all its inhabitants, both strong and weak...was like a fantastic vision of fairyland, like a dream which in its turn would vanish and pass away like vapour in the dark blue sky'. F.M Dostoevsky, 'A Weak Heart' (1841) in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (Leningrad, vol. 19, 1972 - 88), p. 69. Cited in Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2002), pp. 161-162.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison Salisbury, 'The Leningrad Apocalypse' and '"T" is for Tania', chapters in *The 900 Days...* pp. 473-96. The Marquis De Custine described St. Petersburg in 1839 as a city 'where sooner or later, the water will settle accounts with the arrogance of man'. Marquis De Custine, *Journey for our Time The Journals of the Marquis De Custine Russia 1839* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p. 61.

this sense of new beginnings by stating that ‘Here, every street, every house, every stone reeks of history, of our glorious national culture and of revolutionary exploits. Here, the Peterburgskii proletariat under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party lifted the banner of the revolutionary struggle against tsarist autocracy, landowners and capitalists. Here began a new era in the history of humanity - the era of the Great October Socialist Revolution. It is not in vain that the people of Leningrad call their city “*the cradle of revolution*”¹⁰⁷. Leningraders were encouraged to take pride in their heritage. Yet, the boundaries of this patriotism were clearly defined.

The city may ‘reek’ of history but it is a history which began in October 1917. Shumilov’s statement that ‘Here began a new era in the history of humanity’ also ‘posits a perfect beginning, or paradise, or it may posit a perfect ending, a Messianic kingdom...’¹⁰⁸ Leningrad embodies ‘the temporalising of essence’ which speaks of origins and ‘firsts’ (the first day of creation, the first man and woman, the first sacrificial offering...’¹⁰⁹).

During the siege St. Petersburg embodied a ‘realised eschatology’ and became ‘the city of illusion and hallucination’¹¹⁰. As Sydney Monas wrote ‘There is no

¹⁰⁷ N.D, Shumilov, ‘*V Dni Blokady*’, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 88. During the civil war when the White Armies stood perched upon the Pulkovo Heights overlooking Leningrad Trotskii invoked a similar vision. ‘Red Petrograd must remain...’ Leningrad was ‘the torch of the Revolution [and] the iron rock on which we will build the church of the future’. Lev Trotskii, *Kak Vooruzhalas’ Revoliutsiia (na voennoi rabote)* II, (Moscow, 1923), p. 399. Cited also in Bruce W. Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight*...p. 245.

¹⁰⁹ Leonard Coupe, *Myth*, p. 86. See also Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 381.

¹¹⁰ Sydney Monas, ‘Unreal City: St. Petersburg and Russian Culture’, in *Russian Literature and American Critics*, edited by Kenneth N. Brostrom (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1984), p. 388.

distinction between the authors and their characters, between historic personages and the mythology that haunts the streets'¹¹¹.

Blokadnikis' statements concerning the uniqueness of their heritage conjoin with a widespread belief that the siege destroyed the true essence of St. Petersburg. Tat'iana Letenkova and others assert that the 'real' Leningraders have all gone. In this sense the siege brought with it a 'realised eschatology' as for this generation it does indeed represent a kind of apocalypse. Viktoriia Ruslanova recalled returning from her years of evacuation to a desolate city. 'The buildings were black. All the windows had been smashed. Curtains blew in the air. It stayed like that for a long time after the war'¹¹².

The siege also conjured up images of revelation. Nikolai Chukovskii was struck by how the city, through its emptiness possessed an 'unbelievable beauty'¹¹³. This also echoes Elena Vishnevskaiia's recollection of the 'frozen silence' that enveloped the city. Aleksandr Cherapukhin recalled the strange sight of Leningrad's monuments masked by tarpaulin¹¹⁴. For some the siege revealed the city's hidden beauty, yet for others like Letenkova it made them feel alone and vulnerable.

¹¹¹ Sydney Monas, *Unreal City...*, p. 384.

¹¹² BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 26.

¹¹³ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*, p. 556.

¹¹⁴ BL8/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

Leningraders had been forced to confront both the history and beauty of their city in new ways. They had witnessed the city in what many believed to be its purest form. With the hustle and bustle of normal city life silenced during the 900 days they were struck above all by the grandeur and history of St. Petersburg. This in turn became a true source of inspiration and patriotic defiance.

Consequently, as a categorical identity, being a citizen of Leningrad is perceived by many *blokadniki* to be something distinct from being a citizen of any other Russian city or town. If they were not aware of this special sense of identity before the war, the abnormal conditions brought about during the siege often compelled them to apprehend their city in a fresh light.

2) WARTIME DUTIES

Wartime duties are a central facet of patriotic discourse in siege narrative. Aleksandra Arkhipova recalled the city administration's call for vigilance and for young people to report any suspicious looking people as potential spies. She now looks upon these duties with some humour as the concept of teenage girls apprehending foreign agents seems faintly ridiculous. But she was immensely proud of her duties upon rooftops where she defused unexploded incendiary bombs with sand.

These duties brought her closer to her fellow Leningraders and she asserts that 'Our kind of patriotism was normal. Those closest to us were defending our

country... This was not propaganda... Yes, it was (a local) sense of that which existed. We lived in a city... all you heard was who had died, who was being buried... People were dying, we knew we had to break the blockade...' She also identified with Shostakovitch because, like her, he defused incendiary bombs on the rooftops¹¹⁵.

Valentina Kuznetsova echoed Arkhipova's patriotic sentiments in some ways but not in others. She placed an emphasis first upon her duties on rooftops defusing bombs and upon pride in being a Leningrader. For her, this pride was inextricably linked with musical activities during the siege and in particular with the legendary premiere of Shostakovitch's 'Leningrad' Symphony. On the other hand, she was not willing to discuss the reality of Stalin's antagonism towards the city and met this topic with complete bemusement¹¹⁶.

Svetlana Gachina stressed her participation in the brigades which served upon rooftops and the fact that women and teenage girls fulfilled exactly the same roles as men. 'Like the men, we cleared away the snow and built the barricades'¹¹⁷.

Tat'iana Goncharenko referred to her various activities as a nurse and service on the railways and roads simply by stating, 'I did everything!' Sergei Goncharenko was proud above all of his military service in the navy¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Valentina Kuznetsova, July 2003, St. Petersburg, transcript, pp. 1-3.

¹¹⁷ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, transcript, p 11.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the 'Other's side of the story' has recently tempered positive statements about the nature of military service during the 900 days. As stated previously during the opening days of the war Sergei Goncharenko lost his ship while Svetlana Gachina recalled that few if any of her fellow students returned from the front.

In reality, many soldiers such as Nikolai Amel'ko who suffered from lack of food and ammunition were forced to improvise in ways similar to the civilian populace. He and his comrades managed to distill bitter beer from the scorched sugar extracted from the ground around the Badaevskii warehouses¹¹⁹. Others, such as Aleksandra Kochneva faced her lack of ammunition and supplies with some good humour. She recalls a voice echoing across the trenches asking if anyone was still there. The answer came back, 'Yes, and where do you think we would go?'¹²⁰

In general, veterans are quite clearly fond of reminiscing about their wartime duties. Svetlana Gachina described the atmosphere at work in the following manner: 'Now, well, in the war, in the blockade, these were tough, difficult times but how many wonderful people there were then, and *how* they related to one another. How they wished to help one another. At this time of utmost hardship we all became equal. Well, I was a student at the Music Conservatory, supposed to be intelligent, that kind of person, but when I was called out to join the workers I became like

¹¹⁹ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 4.

¹²⁰ Admiral Nikolai Nikolaevich Amel'ko, '*Chast' 2: Voina*', <Z -Istoria, Users.iptelecom.net.ua> 23 January 2005, [accessed 11/06/2005].

all the others, a simple working woman. There was an absolute closeness among us and a spirit of kindness'¹²¹. Again, the 'imagined' community is depicted as one of comradeship and mutual support.

Salisbury concurs with this view and states that as the threat of German occupation receded old grievances and literary and political squabbles gradually resurfaced.

'During the worst days almost all of this had vanished. Leningrad had become one family'¹²². Yet, Salisbury's assertion in this regard is too generalised and at the time of the publication of his book many siege testimonies remained heavily censored¹²³. In this statement he therefore unwittingly became caught up in further myth production.

In reality, the Red Army's training methods appear to have often been makeshift and chaotic. Consequently, a sense of togetherness was attained through acquiring the ability to improvise as a group and in adopting coping strategies (such as the use of black humour) which lessened the psychological burden placed upon soldiers¹²⁴.

Nevertheless, the willingness to improvise also becomes a strand of patriotic discourse. Natalia Rudina recalled that '...people cleared away the snow. This was

¹²¹ Bair Irincheev, interview with Aleksandra Fedorovna Kochneva, '*Ia Pomniu*', <www.iremember.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

¹²² BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side A, transcript, p. 7.

¹²³ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 557.

¹²⁴ Vladimir Gal'ba cheered up his fellow troops with satirical cartoons of German leaders. Hitler was portrayed as a stray dog while Goebbels was depicted as a monkey. Gal'ba, who worked in the offices of *Leningradskaiia Pravda* during the siege stated that 'When we laughed, the fear disappeared'. '*Boevoi i Dobryi Karandash*', *Nevskoe Vremia*, <www.nevskoevremia.spb.ru> 17 November 2004 [accessed 4/06/2005].

in the spring (1942). There were many corpses lying under it. Then came the call on the radio: "Comrades pick up your spades or anything else you can find and clean up the city!" The Germans believed there would be an epidemic. They were wrong',¹²⁵.

Rudina's testimony is a striking example of patriotic siege narrative. Like the passages in Lidiia Smirnova's testimony (see also p. 206) these statements blend official Soviet slogans with personal memory. Rudina recalled that 'We were taken from the school to take part in work building defences. This was until August (1941) when the German forces very rapidly began to attack. Then Mga and Pushkin were taken. Kolpino began to be constantly shelled... One day in November my mother said to me that the shelling had stopped and that we could go out. Suddenly there was an explosion... Mama was standing outside and was killed. I was left alone'.

'It was decided that I could live in the cellar of my school. Then I went to work at the factory. In 41', 42' and 43' I worked there in the munitions factory... They were fourteen year old teenagers working there, boys and girls. Many of them did not go home after work. When the ration was 125 grams or 200 for workers people had to conserve energy. They couldn't make it home. But the work had to be done. They did, as it was said, 'Everything for the front! Everything for Victory!' We did this in order to have faith that we would be victorious. Life and work! That was it. Yes,

¹²⁵ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 4.

the work was very difficult because of the hunger but it was done. Nevertheless, despite this in our free time we went around in groups helping the wounded after their homes had been destroyed. We all helped one another. We had to help people who were too weak to collect their rations. We did this with pride. In one house there was the corpse of a mother alongside her little child. We did all this. We helped one another in order to give us faith that victory had to come...'

'Then in 1942 I fought at the front after the Germans seized a couple of houses on the outskirts. The attack was terrible. We did not give in. 'Not on step backwards!' They broadcasted agitation from loud speakers. We were not frightened because this was just propaganda. We knew they did not have the strength to break through. We had complete faith in our victory'¹²⁶.

Rudina's testimony is quoted at length because it exhibits key tendencies redolent of patriotic siege discourse. First of all the 'will-to-sacrifice' is invoked by the image of dystrophic teenagers working and sleeping in the factories. In addition, they spent any energy they still possessed in assisting the wounded and the housebound. Several phrases are notable. "Everything for the front! Everything for victory!" has already been examined on page 8. Then the phrase '*Zhizn i rabota!*' or 'Life and work!' seems to embody both the ethos of this 'imagined' community and the Socialist values of her youth.

¹²⁶ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, pp. 4-5.

Finally, “Not one step backwards!” is perhaps the most famous of all wartime slogans. “*Ni shagu nazad!*” or “Not one Step backwards!” refers to Stalin’s order no.227 which led infamously to the execution of Soviet soldiers by divisions placed in the rear. Yet, Rudina still associates her steadfastness in the face of the German assault upon Kolpino with Stalin’s order. It is a prime example of the successful and resilient interpellation of Soviet propaganda.

Patriotic spirit in many cases also emerged from a realisation of the intense suffering brought about by the continued German assault on Leningrad. This is certainly the case with the veterans from Kolpino. The death of Rudina’s mother would have clearly instilled a deep resentment within her towards the German forces.

These statements echo Aleksandra Arkhipova’s assertion that ‘More than a million died. Where is the agitation or propaganda in that?’ Even if state propaganda was not always effective the reality soon dawned on the populace that Fascism was a ruthless doctrine¹²⁷. It also recalls Lidiia Smirnova’s statement cited earlier that ‘Mama died. Father died of hunger. My little brother was three years old. He died as well’¹²⁸.

Through dedicating themselves to their military duties Rudina and Smirnova could also postpone the day when they would have to confront this immense personal loss.

¹²⁷ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 7.

¹²⁸ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 11.

Other *blokadniki*, such as Anastasiia Mutovkina, who lost both her parents during the siege, recalled being overcome with bewilderment and sadness as she was permitted to return home. She suddenly realised there was no one left to go home to¹²⁹. Boris Mefodiev bemoaned the fact that he will probably never find out where his father and older brother are buried while Lidiia Tarasova lost her father in 1943 and still has no inkling of how he died¹³⁰.

There is no doubt that military service created communities but death constantly disrupted this process. Gachina's assertion that 'Everyone was killed' is an acknowledgement of the scale of the casualties. Correspondingly, the myth of comradeship must be qualified through reference to the brutal realities which Leningraders faced. These realities emboldened the 'will to sacrifice'. In this regard, propaganda was much easier to interpellate because it resonated with personal experience.

3) 'A MUZY NE MOLCHALI'

Alongside military activities cultural events played a key role in raising morale. Rozanova stated that the perception during the siege that the 'muses were never silent' created a genuine sense of patriotism¹³¹. This phrase, which has been the title of numerous articles and exhibitions over the years has attained a central place

¹²⁹ Anastasiia Mikhailovna Mutovkina, 'Otblesk Vechnogo Ognia'.

¹³⁰ Boris Mefodiev, *Blokadniki vspominali, kak prozhit' bez tepla i goriachei vody*, 28 January 2003 <www.vesti.ru> (Rekviem.ru) [accessed 09/06/2005]. Lidiia Tarasova, *Pis'mo iz Proshlo, Neva*, no.5, 2004, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 8/06/2005].

¹³¹ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 14.

in siege mythology. The well known Russian saying which asserts that ‘When shells resound, the muses fall silent’ was turned on its head by the astonishing amount of cultural activity which took place during the siege. These activities played an almost equally crucial role to military service¹³².

Valentina Kuznetsova, herself a composer, while being interviewed sang a substantial portion of the first movement of Shostakovitch’s ‘Leningrad’ symphony over the telephone. With impressive detail she introduced each musical entry. Ol’ga Rozanova had a personal connection to the Leningrad premiere which took place in August 1942. ‘They had to go to the front and seek out musicians, one of whom was our friend, the trombonist Dmitri Fedorovich Chudnemko. After they had assembled the players and rehearsed the piece they prepared for the premiere. Before the concert began, our guns fired off a series of salvos. Thus, we insured that the Germans would not bomb the city during the concert’¹³³. Kuznetsova exclaimed, ‘Can you imagine, can you imagine myself, and other children pinned to the speakers as we heard the first performance on the radio?’¹³⁴ The myth surrounding the premiere reverses the saying quoted above. In this case it was the guns that fell silent while the muses won the day.

A.N Kriukov maintains that the orchestra performed the symphony with a particular *Leningradskii* string sound¹³⁵. Thus, even through its initial interpretation it became

¹³² The phrases in Russian are ‘*kogda govoriat pushki, muzy molchat* or, ‘*i pushki gremeli i muzy molchali*’, E.N Epanchintsevaia <history.ntagil.ru> ‘*OON v Rossii*’, *ianvar* – *fevral*’ 2001’, *stranitsa no.4* [accessed 18/10/2006].

¹³³ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, pp. 14-15.

¹³⁴ Valentina Kuznetsova, transcript, p. 6.

¹³⁵ A.N Kriukov, *Muzyka v Dni Blokady* (‘Izdatels’two, Kompozitor - Skt. Petersburg, 2002), p. 204.

peculiarly Leningradian. Shostakovitch himself famously declared that this was a symphony as much about 'the Leningrad Stalin destroyed' as the one 'Hitler finished off'¹³⁶. Yet from the moment of the premiere the myth of a siege symphony became enshrined in public consciousness.

During these interviews Shostakovitch was continually referred to as 'ours' and Berggol'ts as 'our poetess'. Cultural reception gained its own momentum as performances of operettas, plays and musical compositions appeared to define that essential sophistication which these *blokadniki* regard as part of the Leningrad character.

Ol'ga Rozanova emphasised the part which culture played in raising morale and also described Ol'ga Berggol'ts as 'our poetess'. She stated that her 'wonderful' *February Diary* depicted how it was to live in Leningrad in February 1942¹³⁷.

The retired workers from the *Elektrosila* plant expressed great pride in the fact that Berggol'ts was the editor of the factory newspaper. They therefore felt a personal connection with Leningrad's celebrated poetess.

Arkhipova recalled being caught in the middle of an air raid on the way to a performance at the *Teatr Muzykal'nou Komedii*. She also took part in

¹³⁶ Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovitch* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 118. The views presented in Volkov's account have proved controversial and their veracity has been challenged by several musicologists. Refer for example to Fay Laurel, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?', *The Russian Review*, 39:4 (October 1980) 484 - 49.

¹³⁷ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11. See also Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, 'Gender. Memory, and National Myths: Ol'ga Berggol'ts and the Siege of Leningrad', *Nationalities Papers*, 28:3 (September 2000), 551-64.

concerts given in hospitals for wounded soldiers¹³⁸. Yet Letenkova did not have any enthusiasm for attending cultural events. ‘Yes, of course a lot was going on. But myself, I couldn’t think about these things’¹³⁹.

The original concert programme for the premiere of Shostakovitch’s symphony is simple and sparse containing a short denunciation of Fascism¹⁴⁰. Today the reception hall of the Composers’ Union of which Shostakovitch was a member is still adorned with a huge plaque displaying the names of musicians who perished. This timely reminder demonstrates to visitors how culture and the war effort became fused together during the 900 days.

Cultural activity was undoubtedly a potent source of patriotic pride during the siege. The photo of Shostakovitch the fireman astride a Leningrad rooftop became perhaps the most famous iconic image of the 900 days. Yet, the surviving generation of *blokadniki* were almost all either children or teenagers during the siege. Consequently, they tended to recall children’s programmes on the radio rather than concert broadcasts.

Cultural activities were certainly recognised as fundamental to the war effort but they were not at the forefront of their patriotic discourse. The radio, in particular was remembered above all for the practical advice it gave out. In general, these *blokadniki* preferred to focus primarily upon their own activities and upon their

¹³⁸ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 16.

¹³⁹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 15.

¹⁴⁰ A copy of the original programme is in the possession of the author.

own immediate surroundings. For some, like Letenkova, the sphere of cultural activity seemed rather remote.

4) THE ROLE OF WOMEN DURING THE SIEGE

As Soviet women, unlike their western counterparts, took part in almost every aspect of the war effort their stories do not sit neatly with the concept of gendered narrative. In the west there are clear dividing lines between recollections of life on the home front and testimonies made by male combatants. In Russia this is clearly not the case. As demonstrated below Russian women are as likely as their male counterparts to recall the bloody realities of the war.

In addition, as the majority of surviving Soviet veterans are now women it is interesting to put forward the possibility that the story of the siege as a whole is becoming more gendered. To a large extent, siege narrative today reflects the concerns of women. These survivors even state that women were hardier and more resilient than men during the siege.

Aleksandra Arkhipova concurred with this view by stating that women were better equipped psychologically to cope with the privations of siege life. This was demonstrated according to Arkhipova by the fact that they tended to remain

active at all times. Men saw the home as a place of rest, and indolence. She stated that 'I was fifteen years old. We all worked...The men who stayed behind did not work...because of this they died...Women were better equipped mentally for these conditions. They are hardier...In general, women survived that first Winter but men did not...We never sat still'¹⁴¹.

Arkhipova's assertions are supported by Ol'ga Rozanova and a number of others in this group who recalled that the first close family member to perish was usually the father. Svetlana Gachina recalled that 'Like the men, we cleared away the snow and built the barricades...But then, in general there were only women left'¹⁴². Again, she agreed at this point in the discussion that women were somehow hardier. When asked about this Tat'iana Letenkova simply responded, 'Yes, of course'¹⁴³. On the other hand, Elena Vishnevskaiia was careful to add that 'My father served on the *doroga zhizni* (*road of life*). We should remember that men played their part'¹⁴⁴.

The assertions made by these female respondents appear to be supported by documentary evidence. Edward Bubis and Blair A. Ruble state that St. Petersburg was a 'traditionally male city, yet by April 1945, 76 percent of all Leningraders

¹⁴¹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹⁴² BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 10.

¹⁴³ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 10.

employed in industry were now female, suggesting that women were the predominant sex in the city's population as a whole'. The war therefore brought about a process which led to the feminisation of Leningrad, through the decimation of males and the 'in-migration (of women) from already female-dominated areas'¹⁴⁵. The maintenance of physical activity is also clinically proven to be an effective method of prolonging life during famine. This was noted by the clinician Svetlana Magaeva (see also pp. 30-31), who observed that if dystrophic patients remained active they were considerably more likely to survive¹⁴⁶.

Natalia Rudina, as stated earlier emphasised the dedication of young girls and boys who slept in the factories. Ol'ga Pisarenko recalled one girl who worked in the Kirov factory who brought in her doll each day for comfort¹⁴⁷. Rudina's grim discovery of a dead mother and child is similar to the experiences of other teenage girls who served in voluntary detachments. Granin and Adamovich note that the MPVO brigades also uncovered many instances of cannibalism as they entered flats across the city during the Spring of 1941¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁵ Eduard Bubis and Blair A. Ruble, 'The Impact of World War II on Leningrad', in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan Linz (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allenheld, 1985), p. 191.

¹⁴⁶ Magaeva herself was at one point so ill during the siege that she was pronounced dead and carried off to the mortuary. Magaeva, 'Physiological and Psychosomatic...' (pp. 150-51).

¹⁴⁷ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 204-5.

¹⁴⁸ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 490.

On the other hand, many people were saved from certain death as a result of their dedication. Solomon Rytsar' recalled a tablet being placed gently in his mouth as young members of the MPVO attempted to revive him¹⁴⁹. The celebrated Russian soprano Galina Vishnevskaja was also saved by one of these brigades. 'A team of three women came to my apartment...If they hadn't come then, it would have been the end of me'¹⁵⁰. Vishnevskaja also stated that the burdens placed on women led them to adopt male habits. 'They drank like men, and smoked shag tobacco'¹⁵¹. Aleksandra Arkhipova recalled being given a litre of vodka as part of her ration: 'I can assure you that when the time for handing out the next rations came there wasn't a drop left'¹⁵².

The testimonies of female combatants such as Natalia Rudina confirm that women took part in some of the fiercest fighting of the war around Leningrad. Anatolii Beliakov was inspired by a 19 year old year old 'pleasant, dark blue eyed Russian girl' who bravely went to her death in July 1941¹⁵³. Tamara Ovsiannikova recalls seven days of brutal fighting at *Garbatyi Most* in August 1942 which she describes as 'hell on earth'¹⁵⁴.

¹⁴⁹ Solomon Rytsar', *Leningradskie Blokadniki*, Megapolis Org c. 1996-2002 (Israeli Internet Newspaper) 20 July 2003 <www.megapolis.org/aliya/indb.html> [accessed 28/06/2005].

¹⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ Galina Vishnevskaja, *A Russian Story* (Kent, England: Sceptre, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1986), pp. 45 and 47.

¹⁵² BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 17.

¹⁵³ Anatolii Beliakov, 'Blokadnye Zapisi', *Neva*, no.1, 2005, 'Zhurnalnyi Zal' <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 8/06/2005].

¹⁵⁴ Bair Irincheev - interview with Tamara Rodionova Ovsiannikova, *Nachalo Voiny i Blokada*, (date not provided) <www.iremember.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

Raisa Sinitsina, a sanitary worker in a hospital washed bandages and sang to cheer up the troops. She was wounded twice during air raids. Once, after a bomb hit the hospital she was working in she helped extract leg and arm amputees from the burning building. She said this was the hardest night of her life. Time and again she entered the building with rescue teams. Her hair and face were scorched, but she refused to give up¹⁵⁵.

A sense of patriotism even pervades the memories of those who were very young during the siege. As the blockade tightened Elena Vishnevskaja began her schooling. She maintained that school life was not disrupted. One day she and her schoolmates crossed the *Volodarskii* bridge. There was a commotion as her school friends, all seven year olds called her over. They witnessed the dead and the wounded who had been hit by falling incendiary bombs. She was 'curious' rather than frightened. 'I still went on to my classes'¹⁵⁶. She was proud of this sense of determination to complete her journey.

Nina Zakharova recalls a young girl whose ingenuity saved her little brother. As they struggled home on the point of collapse she gave him a tiny crumb of bread each time he managed to pass a new building¹⁵⁷. Like Rudina, Tat'iana Mikheeva was orphaned during the siege. She managed to survive an entire month alone in her family flat by making *duranda* from joiner's glue¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁵ Ina Shapiro, *The Red Army Celebrate Victory*, 8 May 2005 <www.haaretz.com> accessed [8 June 2005].

¹⁵⁶ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Nina Aleksandrovna Zakharova, *Vo imia budushchego...*

¹⁵⁸ Iuliia Kantor, *Na vsiu ostavshuiusia...*

Adamovich and Granin cite the story of Nikolai Ivanovich Lebedev who rescued starving children stranded in the Dzherzhinskii District. Lebedev came across two twins called Serezha and Sonia. He watched as Serezha tried to give Sonia a crumb of bread. Sonia handed it back saying 'It's so difficult for men to survive wars',¹⁵⁹. She was only 3 years old yet had somehow become conscious of the disparity between male and female survival rates.

This demonstrates the plausibility of Aleksandra Arkhipova's observation that women were somehow hardier than men during the siege. Yet, there are also accounts of women who did not fulfill their patriotic duties. Marija Mashkova remembers a boy called Igor' who lost his ration card and was scolded by his mother who then refused to share her bread with him. He died later as a consequence of her cruelty¹⁶⁰. The mother subsequently committed suicide after the war. Adamovich and Granin confirm that women were also involved in cannibalism and that both male and females made up the ranks of the suspiciously well fed speculators who loitered around the Haymarket¹⁶¹.

Ol'ga Smirnova recalled meeting a neighbour who was delighted when her husband died at the beginning of month so that she could use his ration card for several weeks. She also remembered a conversation with a school teacher who had hoped for her daughter's death for the same reason¹⁶². Most chillingly, Anna Chemena recalled that a local woman had cut up her neighbour's son for meat¹⁶³.

¹⁵⁹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 167.

¹⁶⁰ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 170-71.

¹⁶¹ *Glavy, kotorykh ne bylo*, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 487-496.

¹⁶² Anna Maiskaia, 'Nas spasli Mamina Zelion'.

¹⁶³ Alla Borisovna Chemena, 'Vrach Blokadnogo Leningrada'.

There is no doubt though that the heroism of women plays a central part in collective memory of the siege.

The testimonies of female combatants included in this survey demonstrate that women are equally proud of their military service and just as willing as men to recall the horrors of war. Rudina's account of her participation in fierce fighting on the outskirts of Kolpino is a striking example.

As the carnage of the Great Patriotic War 'rendered the patriotic impulse sacred' the image of the Soviet woman combatant became a centerpiece of state propaganda¹⁶⁴. Women proved among other things to be particularly able snipers and across a wide range of military duties set a 'standard of self-sacrifice, professional pride and patriotism'¹⁶⁵. As Roger D. Markwick states this 'people's war' was also 'a women's war. Women partisans, snipers, tank drivers, and fighter pilots became models of Soviet heroism'¹⁶⁶. He also goes on to state that 'Soviet women's active participation in war, in contrast to Nazi exclusion of women, reflected their place in peacetime society, as producers, not just mothers'¹⁶⁷.

The fact that Arkhipova, Gachina and others perceive the role of Soviet women during wartime as unrestricted means that these narratives differ sharply from

¹⁶⁴ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War*, p. 332.

¹⁶⁵ Catherine Merridale notes that 'Femininity turned out to be no obstacle to certain kinds of soldiering'. She states that this was especially true as regards sniper training. *Ivan's War*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁶ Roger D. Markwick, 'Stalinism at War', *Kritika*, 5:4 (Autumn 2004), 509-20 (p. 514).

¹⁶⁷ Roger D. Markwick, 'Stalinism at War' (p. 515).

their western counterparts. Sharon Ouditt writes that women in the west 'remained aware that one occupation remained closed to them. They were expected to produce shells rather than fire them. She goes on to state that 'images of femininity can be strategically invoked in war situations to reinforce a patriotic faith in civilization. Fighters needed a concrete image of what they were fighting for'¹⁶⁸.

Women in the west though 'were expected to mop up the ghastly effects of the fighting' without having any direct affect on its outcome¹⁶⁹. Ouditt is writing about the participation of English women in World War I but Penny Summerfield comes to similar conclusions when discussing the role of women in World War II. She describes the sense of freedom attained by women during wartime as 'circumscribed'¹⁷⁰.

In the west the partial emancipation of women during World War II released them from domesticity into a sense of citizenship. Yet, the postwar period saw them return to that domesticity as part of a 'regretful return to marginality'¹⁷¹. Soviet women on the other hand shared the unspeakable truths of war with their male counterparts. In this respect their image represented the Great Patriotic War

¹⁶⁸ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces...* p. 45.

¹⁷⁰ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998), pp. 80-81.

¹⁷¹ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p. 208.

at all levels; from the motherland itself and the Russian landscape, to the *frontoviki* who drove tanks, fought in the trenches and suffered the same hardships as men.

Within the Soviet context femininity became what Roland Barthes termed 'the signifier par excellence'. It became 'a shifting element which can combine with similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes and symbols'¹⁷². At home and at the front femininity as a signifier became an emotive weapon in the Soviet propagandist armoury. At the same time, Soviet women, freed from the kind of marginality endured by their western counterparts found themselves at the heart of death, yet paradoxically at the heart of life¹⁷³.

5) THE QUESTION OF SOVIET IDENTITY AND SOCIALISM WITH A HUMAN FACE

The impetus that spurs the patriotic impulse stems from a series of overlapping identities. Within the Russian context patriotism is a particularly complex topic. The Soviet Union consisted of numerous ethnic and religious groups. There has also always been a clear distinction between life in the city and life on the land. After 1917 a new Soviet identity was added to this mix. With the fall of the Soviet Union it is interesting to investigate to what extent *blokadniki* still regard themselves as Soviets.

¹⁷² Roland Barthes, *S/Z, An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 17.

¹⁷³ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces...*p. 31.

As stated in the previous chapter Svetlana Boym also makes the assertion that contemporary discourse in the Russian media has been de-ideologised¹⁷⁴. She regards this as part of a wider reluctance on the part of the Russian media to examine and confront the Stalinist period. While published testimonies certainly reflect this trend the interviews conducted for this study do not point towards a reluctance upon the part of *blokadniki* to discuss this important aspect of their past lives.

Essentially, their attitudes affirm Stephen Kotkin's observation that this was 'Socialism with a human face'. This face of course was Stalin's. Kotkin also states that his image was 'reassuring' and there is no doubt as demonstrated below that *blokadniki* are very willing to reminisce about their feelings towards him¹⁷⁵. Daniil Granin, who reacts vehemently against a time when Leningrad was 'torn to pieces by fear' does not seem to be in tune with fellow survivors in this respect¹⁷⁶.

Kotkin's analysis is a refreshing one in that he acknowledges the religious connotations behind Stalin's image. *Blokadnikis'* ideology is more akin to religious faith. It is founded upon an almost spiritual devotion to Stalin,

¹⁷⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 57-58.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press Ltd, 1995), p. 227.

¹⁷⁶ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p.17.

acquired during their most impressionable years. This is why religious faith appeared redundant to Aleksandra Arkhipova and others. They already had a faith, and therefore did not need to supplement it with another one.

In addition to these findings it also became clear that Soviet identity remains a very real and resonant identity for elderly Leningraders. For example, the Goncharenkos, when asked whether they felt themselves to be first and foremost either Russians, Leningraders or Soviet citizens answered without hesitation that they regarded themselves as '*Sovietskie*'¹⁷⁷. The veterans in Kolpino emerged as the most fiercely patriotic group regarding Soviet identity. As they spoke, iconic posters and patriotic images adorned the walls behind them.

Roger D. Markwick writes that patriotism replaced Marxist-Leninism as a spur to mobilization in 1941. The Soviet government was skeptical about the efficacy of Marxist-Leninism as a mobiliser and subsequently Russified Soviet patriotism while concurrently placing Stalin centre stage as the embodiment of nationhood¹⁷⁸. Markwick goes on to state that the battle cry: "*Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!*" was, 'an official one' yet was later 'genuinely embraced by the troops'¹⁷⁹. This was echoed by Kolpino veteran Viktor Oleinikov who exclaimed, 'You have never ever heard a cry like that

¹⁷⁷ BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, transcript, p. 16.

¹⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹ Roger D. Markwick, 'Stalinism at War' (p. 515).

when we shouted “*Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!*” We would also shout “*Vpered za Stalina!*” (“Forward for Stalin!”)¹⁸⁰.

Sergei Goncharenko made a subsequent statement which also concurred with the views of the other respondents. There was, he insisted, absolutely no discrimination which existed on his boat. All nationalities were equal and they never even noticed such differences; they all considered themselves to be ‘Soviet’ citizens¹⁸¹.

In the museum *A muzy ne molchali* I was directed towards a wartime photo taken of a group of composers¹⁸². It was stressed that though they came from a variety of different backgrounds these composers were all considered equal. The myth of Soviet identity as an overarching identity which glued Russian society together is a remarkably resilient one.

Ol’ga Rozanova and Aleksandra Arkhipova both asserted that ethnic background was of no consequence during wartime. What mattered was that he ‘was ours’ and that he was ‘Soviet’¹⁸³. Sergei Goncharenko accompanied his statement by recalling that Stalin’s decision to remain in Moscow during the critical months of late 1941 was an important source of inspiration for Leningraders. The Goncharenkos felt

¹⁸⁰ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 14.

¹⁸¹ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 16.

¹⁸² Interview with Ol’ga Prout, St. Petersburg, July 2003, tape reference, BLA/JC/06/03/OP, transcript, pp. 1-17.

¹⁸³ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 9 and BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11.

that Stalin shared the people's suffering because his son Iakov was captured by the Germans. At one point in the discussion they responded to the question of his leadership with the simple response, 'We believed'¹⁸⁴. The concept of Socialist ideology as faith is invoked again.

Svetlana Gachina, when asked about Stalin's attitude towards Leningrad replied 'History will judge...I couldn't say whether Stalin liked or disliked Leningrad...maybe it was because Leningrad was too near the border...well, concerning *Leningradskoe Delo* of course, there was a lot of awful and unjust things that happened...all these documents have been revealed...but my opinion is that Stalin did a lot for the government...Stalin's steadfastness (during the war) was genuine...when he died why did we cry? Because it seemed to mean the end of the country...' In response to the question concerning Soviet identity she stated that 'We wished to defend first and foremost our city and our country... Well, my generation, we loved our youth and our twenties. These were years of great hope and faith. We did not have faith in God but in what we were doing'¹⁸⁵.

Ol'ga Rozanova responded to the question of whether the Soviet system was perceived as something worth defending with the following response: 'Well, the Soviet system was not perfect...well, we wished to defend our city. What

¹⁸⁴ BL5/JC/06/03/STG, side A, transcript, pp. 14-15. In reality Stalin regarded Iakov's capture as a consequence of his son's perceived weakness. According to Montefiore he cursed the fact that Iakov did not do the honourable thing and take his own life (Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*...p. 336). Nevertheless, Stalin revised this view later stating that 'No, Yakov would have prefer any kind of death to betraying the Motherland' (Montefiore, p. 429).

¹⁸⁵ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, pp. 23-24.

does this mean, system? This is a country of great musicians and writers.

What wonderful films and literature we had during the war'¹⁸⁶.

Aleksandra Arkhipova though, appeared at first to be a little unsure about the relevance of Soviet identity stating that, 'We fought for the motherland... but Soviet...we thought less about this. For Stalin, yes, but for the Soviet system.... Stalin commanded our armed forces...in him we saw our eventual victory...we thought he knew everything in his head...We believed in him like a God. But, whether we were defending Socialism I personally was not thinking about that'¹⁸⁷.

Arkhipova's statement makes it clear that for her, the entire war effort was dependent upon Stalin's acumen and leadership. A number of other respondents repeated an identical phrase: 'Well of course, Stalin that meant everything'¹⁸⁸.

Veterans recalled the death of Stalin as a time of immense national grief.

Arkhipova simply stated, 'Of course when he died I wept'¹⁸⁹. These statements echo Dmitri Volkogonov's recollection that when Stalin died 'I thought the sky would fall in'¹⁹⁰. In this regard, the impact of Soviet propaganda underlining

¹⁸⁶ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 12.

¹⁸⁷⁻⁸⁸ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, pp. 8-9.

¹⁸⁹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p. 564.

Stalin's personal role in conducting the military campaign cannot be underestimated.

Perhaps the most emotive statement was made by Lidiia Smirnova. 'In 1941, Stalin, that means *everything*! When you went into attack the first cry would be: "*Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!*" The image of Stalin? I might be an old person but the image of Stalin is as clear to me today as it was then'¹⁹¹.

The few *blokadniki* who expressed a contrary view, especially Tat'iana Letenkova remind us that this remains a sensitive topic. Elena Vishnevskaiia stated almost reluctantly that, 'Well, of course Stalin was a very popular leader'¹⁹². Boym laments especially the fact that 'the collective trauma of the past was hardly acknowledged...'¹⁹³. In addition, she poses the question as to why, even now 'everyday Soviet myths, affections and practices' stubbornly live on. Communist teleology was extremely powerful and intoxicating; and its loss is greatly missed in the post-Communist world'¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹⁰ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 19.

¹⁹¹ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 12.

¹⁹²⁻⁹³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁹⁴⁻⁹⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. 60-61. This trend has also been reflected in recent films such as Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye Lenin* (2003). In *Goodbye Lenin* everyday objects such as furniture and cans of food become representative of the Communist past. It also depicts the rift between the post-Communist present and a past which already appears remote and distant.

She goes on to state that 'It took the experience of the Second World War to make Soviet patriotism into a truly grassroots phenomenon'¹⁹⁵. She identifies the existence of a counter memory among certain members of the populace which challenged the official Soviet version of history. Nevertheless, this 'critical reflection on history soon faded out of fashion'¹⁹⁶. She also observes the irony that Communist era statues, so recently objects of scorn, have been dusted off and 'are standing tall again...' She regards these trends as all part of a growing mass nostalgia towards the Communist era¹⁹⁷.

Nevertheless, certain respondents were aware of contradictions between memory of the past and the reality of living during the Stalinist era. Aleksandra Arkhipova asked, 'How many churches did Stalin destroy and how many priests were imprisoned?'¹⁹⁸ At this point she questioned Stalin's wartime relaxation of his attitude towards the church asserting that it was based solely upon expediency.

Amongst published testimonies there are certainly a minority which confront the Stalinist era head on. Iván Kharkevich, who designed a pack of cards with caricatures of the Nazi leadership as part of his duties as a wartime propagandist refuses to mythologise the past. Kharkevich, now in his nineties is dismissive of

¹⁹⁸ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 22.

the kind of mass nostalgia identified by Svetlana Boym. 'I am very happy that we have democracy, although it is only a vague resemblance of democracy. But we have hope'. He also commented that 'I wonder why people praise Stalin nowadays. I can't understand it after he killed so many of our innocent population'¹⁹⁹.

The issue of whether prominent figures from the Soviet era should be rehabilitated was recently debated by veterans on Radio Svoboda. Recent efforts by Boris Grizlov to reappraise Stalin's image drew markedly different responses. Grizlov, who was at that time the president of the Duma had recently described Stalin as an 'exceptional person' and insisted that attitudes towards him were changing in Russia²⁰⁰. One veteran supported the idea of a statue of Stalin while another exclaimed, 'Please God don't let this happen'²⁰¹.

Nikita Lomagin has recently identified a widespread malaise which existed amongst the populace during the siege itself. He quotes one soldier from the 53rd Battalion who noted bitterly that after an attack on German positions not a

¹⁹⁹ Simone Kozuharov, 'Anti-Fascist Card Deck Caricatured Nazi Bosses', *St. Petersburg Times*, 27 January 2004 <www.sptimes.ru> [accessed 5/06/2005].

²⁰⁰ Gryzlov stated that Stalin was an 'exceptional' person who made a huge contribution to the victory over Hitler. *Gryzlov: Stalin – Nezarudnyi Chelovek*, *Rosbalt*, 21 December 2004 <<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2004/12/21/189987.html>> [accessed 3/10/2005]. The leader of the Communist Party Gennadii Zhiuganov also laid a wreath on Stalin's grave on the 125th anniversary of his birth. <[Grani.ru](http://grani.ru), <http://grani.ru/society/p.81774.html>> 21 December 2004, [accessed 3/10/2005].

²⁰¹ The caller is not named but states that he is a former citizen of 'besieged Leningrad'. He also called the proposals a 'disgrace' exclaiming that he did not know 'what Gryzlov is thinking of'. Elena Rykovtseva, *Pamiatniki Stalinu k iubeleiu Pobedy - informatsiia ili reabilitatsiia?* *Radio Svoboda*, 20 January 2005 <radiosvoboda.org> [accessed 2/06/2005].

single of his comrades remained alive²⁰². There are also numerous statements which accuse the government of being unprepared in the lead up to war²⁰³.

There is a clear sense of abandonment by the Soviet authorities and a resignation towards imminent defeat²⁰⁴. One engineer protested that 'Unless Leningrad is given over it will be the end for all of us'²⁰⁵. A maintenance man working in the *Konstruktor* factory also complained that the government 'talked much but acted little'²⁰⁶.

Lomagin's *Neizvestnaia Blokada* identifies the need for patriotic propaganda as a means of subverting this widespread malaise. He also depicts a situation which sharply contradicts the myths of communal unity propagated during the post war period. Yet, whatever sentiments were expressed during the opening months of the war at a certain point wartime propaganda took root in the minds of the populace.

Of course the story of the siege remained a tightly controlled narrative during the Soviet era. Chroniclers such as Nikolai Gorshkov and A. Vinokurov were repressed for depicting the siege in too realistic a light²⁰⁷. Yet, the attitude

²⁰² Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada*, p. 262.

²⁰³⁻⁰⁴ Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada*, pp. 274 and 79.

²⁰⁵⁻⁰⁶ Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada*, pp. 320-21.

²⁰⁷ A. Vinokurov was arrested and subsequently shot for, 'lowering morale with counter-revolutionary propaganda'. Vsevolod Inchik, 'Pomnit kazhdyi den' blokady pitertsy otmechaiut 60-letie sniatia fashistskoi osady', *Trud (ezhednevnaia gazeta)*, no.007, 16 January 2004 <www.trud.ru> [accessed 17/02/2006]. Nikolai Pavlovich Gorshkov was sentenced to 10 years for 'anti-Soviet agitation'. He recorded numerous incidents of banditism and the theft of ration cards as well as the arrest of twelve women for committing acts of cannibalism. Sergei Turchenko, '60 Let Pobedy, Shest' tetradok v kletochku Leningradets Nikolai Gorshkov vel Blokadnyi Dnevnik, za kotoryi sginul v Gulage', *Trud*, 7- №028, 17 February 2005 <www.trud.ru> [accessed 12/06/2005].

of the majority of the survivors interviewed towards Stalin remained almost devotional. This is encapsulated by the Goncharenkos statement that, 'We believed'.

It could also be said that ordinary factory workers and people in mundane jobs gradually became aware that their activities were more valued than in peacetime. Anatolii Ivanov, a hitherto anonymous worker in a bread factory suddenly noticed that his daily activities were valued and regarded as important²⁰⁸. The bakers near Tat'iana Letenkova's home soon took advantage of the situation. As bread became a valuable commodity the bakers amassed an impressive collection of furniture and artworks in return for food²⁰⁹.

Of course, nostalgia for the Communist era grew during the 1990's when the elderly generation suffered from the effects of economic instability. This was recently emphasised by Mariia Berggol'ts, the sister of the renowned poetess. Berggol'ts complained recently that for two years her flat remained without hot water. 'It is a good job I was at the front because we learned there how to wash ourselves with a mug of water with a spoonful of salt plus some eau de Cologne'²¹⁰. The veterans of the *Elektrosila* plant also regarded the era

²⁰⁸ Liudmila Kalmakova, 'Ia khochu, shtob uznali kartinu sobitii', *Vsevolozhskie Vesti*, 45 (981), 16 April 2004 <vesti.korpunkt.ru> [accessed 2/06/2005].

²⁰⁹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 17. See also p. 292.

²¹⁰ 'Blokadniki vspominali, kak prozhit' bez tepla i goriachei vody', 28 January 2003 <www.vesti.ru>, [accessed 9/06/2005].

of their youth as above all characterised by 'organisation'. This, Iurii Semeonovich asserted, 'is difficult for young people to understand today'²¹¹.

Stephen Kotkin makes an important point in stating that western prejudices towards Communism overlook the reality that many Russians were not coerced into the Stalinist project. He identifies a 'sincere belief' in Communism which is reflected by the statements quoted above. The association between Stalin's steadfastness and the coming victory was also a reflection of a cult which presented 'a reassuring immediacy between Stalin and ordinary people'²¹².

J. Arch Getty states that during the great purges of the 1930's while the intelligentsia and political elite were terrified the wider populace was not so troubled by the constant fear of arrest²¹³. This recalls the observation quoted above by the vice-president of a veterans' club who underlined that the image of Stalin in *blokadnikis*' minds differs sharply from portrayals in recent Russian historiography.

Svetlana Gachina admitted that documents revealing Stalin's crimes have been released but she emphasised that they did not reflect her experiences as a young

²¹¹ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 15.

²¹² Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain...*, p. 227.

²¹³ J. Arch Getty, 'The Politics of Stalinism', in *The Stalin Phenomenon*, edited by Alec Nove (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 104-63, pp. 134-35.

woman during the Stalinist era. She even doubted whether these revelations were reliable. Valentina Kuznetsova, when asked about the postwar oppressions which took place during the 'Leningrad Affair' responded, 'I have no idea what you are talking about'²¹⁴. Understandably, these veterans base their assertions upon lived experience. These experiences are more real to them than subsequent revelations about Stalin's crimes.

Dmitri Volkogonov also reminds us that 'in those years the Dnieper hydroelectric plant and the metallurgical complex of Magnitogorsk were built, and Stakhanov and his like were performing their labours. It was then that the patriotism of the Soviet people grew, reaching its peak in the Great Patriotic War. For these reasons when we condemn Stalin for his crimes, it is politically and morally dishonest, to deny the achievements of the system and its possibilities in principle'²¹⁵. N.S Timasheff describes this Soviet war patriotism as 'a sacred union'²¹⁶.

While discussions about the Stalinist era remain controversial in today's Russia, it is clear that the successful interpellation of Soviet patriotism amongst Leningraders was crucial to the war effort. It remains perceived as a 'sacred union' expressed most notably by statements such as, 'We believed' or, 'Stalin knew everything in his head'.

What is clear, is that revelations about the Stalinist era disseminated during the

²¹⁴ Kuznetsova, transcript, p. 5.

²¹⁵ Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, foreword, pxx.

²¹⁶ N.S Timasheff, 'Reading 13 - The family, the school, the church: the pillars of society shaken and re-enforced' in *The Stalinist Dictatorship*, edited by Chris Ward (London: Arnold, 1998), 303-18, p. 317.

post-Communist era have not been generally interpellated amongst the elderly generation. Stalin's image therefore remains a cornerstone of the 'sacred union' outlined above. It also continues to be a defining feature of *blokadnikis*' patriotism as a whole.

SUMMARY

Patriotism is itself an ideology and the convergence of these two terms brings the discussion full circle. Nevertheless, ideology itself as a separate concept appears to have little resonance for veterans of the blockade. This is why it is difficult to discuss ideology without reference to Stalin because *blokadniki* find this term too abstract. Leningraders clearly needed more emotive sources of inspiration during wartime than lengthy Socialist tracts. This would have probably been particularly true for young people and children. Therefore, their ideology is one defined by mental imagery rather than written discourse.

In response to the question about Stalin's popularity during the war Natalia Velezhova talked of 'icons' in every home. She was then asked whether she was referring to pictures of Stalin. She replied, 'of course'²¹⁷. This is a clear example of how sacred language colours interpretations of the Stalinist era.

Lu Tonglin describes a network of ideological signifiers which 'hold us' in a similar manner to the Althusserian concept of 'hailing'²¹⁸. What is clear is that

²¹⁷ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 27.

²¹⁸ Lu Tonglin, 'Fantasy and Ideology in a Chinese Film: A Zizekian Reading of the Cultural Revolution', *Positions: east asia cultures critique*, 12:2 (Autumn 2004), 539-64 (p. 558).

there are aspects of Soviet ideology which continue to 'hold' *blokadniki*. Mikhail Epshtein observes that 'Communism has proved to be a more radical challenge to capitalism than was originally thought, not only did it change the mode of production, it changed the relationship of base and superstructure in society'²¹⁹.

Harrison Salisbury asserts that the siege emerged *sui generis* as a triumph of the people rather than of the state. What is undeniable is that *blokadnikis'* patriotic spirit in 1941 had a profound moral basis. Ol'ga Rozanova stated simply, 'Fascism is greed'²²⁰. As Maurizio Viroli explains, 'Patriotism is a sense of spiritual connectedness that sustains commitment to the common good'²²¹. *Blokadniki* feel that they served the common good.

Viroli also underlines that 'Patriotic stories have morals to tell...' ²²² As noted earlier Aleksandra Arkhipova emphasised that 'All we really thought about was survival'. This was the moral basis behind her patriotism; a right to exist. Letenkova thought little of the concerts and performances later eulogised in siege historiography. Ultimately, patriotism became important for her only because it helped instil a sense of belief that victory and survival were possible. As Natalia Rudina stated, "Everything for the front! Everything for Victory!" We did all this in order to have faith that we would be victorious. Life and work. That was it'²²³.

²¹⁹ Mikhail Epshtein, 'A Draft Essay on Russian and Western Postmodernism', *Postmodern Culture*, 3: 2 (January 1993), subheading no.26 (no page numbers).

²²⁰ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 8.

²²¹ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 115.

²²² Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country...* p. 8.

²²³ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KN, side A, transcript, pp. 4-5.

A TOPOGRAPHY OF THE UNCANNY: WARTIME LENINGRAD

This chapter examines the mythological topography of wartime Leningrad and the realities of everyday life during the 900 days. In addition, there are also a wide range of objects and artefacts which have been sacralised over the passage of time. These usually fall into two distinct categories. The former, such as the *kusochek khleba* (small piece of bread), the *burzhuika* (small iron stove) and the *kerosinka* (small oil lamp) reflect a sense of clinging on to life, warmth and light. The latter, such as the *zazhigalka* (incendiary bomb) and *sanochki* (childrens' sleds) reminded Leningraders of the constant proximity of death. Normally a symbol of children at play, *sanochki* replaced the hearse as the primary means of transporting the dead to the cemeteries.

Within such extraordinary and trying circumstances it is astonishing that any semblance of everyday life could be achieved at all. Nevertheless, as discussed below, retaining a sense of the everyday became a lynchpin to survival. Walking through St. Petersburg, even today, can also bring about confrontations with the 'hauntology' of wartime Leningrad, particularly for survivors¹. The scars left by shrapnel on the *Isakievskii Sobor* (St. Isaac Cathedral), the vast *Monument to the Defenders of Leningrad* in *Ploshchad' Pobedy* (Victory Square), the unmarked

¹ Refer also to Jen-yi Hsu, 'Ghosts in the City: Mourning and Melancholia in Zhu Tianxin's, The Old Capital', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41: 4 (Winter 2004), 546-64 (p. 547). The concept of 'hauntology' was originally defined by Jacques Derrida when he suggested that the death of Stalin might lead to the return of spectres of Marx. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

graves in the Piskarevsky cemetery, the blue sign on Nevskii Prospekt warning citizens of air raids and the small wartime radio speaker mounted on the walls of the old *Dom Radio* or Radio House. Today, there are relatively few obvious traces of the siege but there are certain locations which still conjure up a 'geography of meanings' which merge present everyday life with the everyday of the blockade².

Blokadniki themselves could also be expected to 'read' their city in different ways than younger generations. Tat'iana Letenkova recalls the time when St. Petersburg's famous sphinxes were removed and buried at a secret location. One day, after the blockade had been lifted she saw they had been returned to their rightful places. 'I burst into tears with joy. What joy!'³ Consequently, having seen their city monuments either camouflaged or removed they retain a special appreciation of their continued presence. As Margaret C. Rodman has observed, memories are etched into the landscape 'as if they bore commemorative plaques'⁴.

The topography of besieged Leningrad was uncanny because it belonged to a parallel reality. The grand former capital of imperial Russia, once a hub of 19th century industrialisation ground to a halt. Wind, cold, darkness and above all silence descended upon the city. Everyday life was lived out across the countless snowy paths carved through untamed snowdrifts. As Tat'iana Letenkova underlined, 'The worst thing about this silence was that you would watch people. They would

² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1984), p. 104.

³ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side B, transcript, p. 22.

⁴ Margaret C. Rodman, 'Empowering Space' in *The anthropology of space and place: locating culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 215.

quietly take a few steps. Stop. Then walk on'. Above all, she feared the darkness.

'I might have been able to walk 100 kilometres but I was terrified of the dark.

God it was awful when it got dark. The dead and the corpses lying all around'⁵.

This evokes an uncanny world of spectres and fear. Natalia Velezhova stated that, 'I had to do everything. Go out and collect water and so on. My mother was a large lady. She could not go out because those people that were engaged in cannibalism might spot her'. Velezhova underlined that 'Yes, the blockade is about cold, hunger and darkness but the absolute worst thing about it was the cannibalism'⁶.

These shadowy creatures gave the dark, silent and freezing streets of wartime Leningrad a sense of menace. Letenkova trusted in her own physical strength to carry out various duties but when darkness fell she was filled with terror. Iurii Semeonovich at the *Elektrosila* plant stated that the darkness was intensified by the grey camouflage on prominent buildings. He recalled the gold colours of the dome of the *Isakievskii Sobor* being painted over by a matt grey finish⁷. Lidiia Blagodarova felt that the darkness was also accentuated by the black tape which covered windows and air vents while Viktoriia Ruslanova remembered that 'At home it was dark but as you walked towards the munitions factory you could see the lights on'⁸.

⁵ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side B, transcript, p. 8.

⁶ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 19.

⁷ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 10.

⁸ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 11.

Of course, Leningraders were accustomed to dark winters in a city which lies on the same latitude as Shetland. Nevertheless, the darkness of 1941–42 was all consuming. Even the climate appeared to respond to this altered state of existence. As Velezhova exclaimed, ‘I was born in Leningrad. I have lived here all my life but I never have seen such cold as during that winter’. Velezhova asserted that though they were weakened by hunger, they were attuned to survival. ‘The blockade is about survival’⁹. This statement echoes Aleksandra Arkhipova’s pronouncements on the same topic quoted earlier.

Outside the home lay the uncanny topography of wartime Leningrad. Inside the home peoples’ priorities changed. As Velezhova stated, ‘Warmth. All we cared about was warm air around us. Chairs, tables, shelves and books were no longer important. You just had to get warm’¹⁰. Velezhova is referring here to possessions being broken up and burnt in tiny stoves called *burzhuiki*. These small unprepossessing stoves became the focus of survival.

The significance of objects therefore became subjected to new criteria. Even money became useless. Tat’iana Letenkova stated, ‘After the war we had plenty of money. During the siege you could not buy anything with it’¹¹. The most prized means of currency was bread. All manner of valuables were exchanged for this life giving commodity.

⁹ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 20.

¹⁰ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 20.

¹¹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 14.

The following chapter begins in the homes of *blokadniki* and examines the iconology of siege life. The discussion then moves out into the landscape of besieged Leningrad. Again, the didactic potential of myth is examined. In this case, it is the simple and mundane *myths of everyday life* which take precedence. This is exemplified by the way in which Leningraders confronted the challenge of creating some kind of functional existence. In addition, key locations, daily journeys and various foods such as *studen'* (jellied soup) and *duranda* (a kind of pancake made from barley flour, oil and sunflower seed husks) are keenly recalled. Not only that but the peculiar tastes and smells of these improvised dishes remain etched on the memory. Again, this is a reflection of an altered reality. From the food on the table to the masked dome of the cathedral of St. Isaac's their local terrain had been defamiliarised, their city, literally 'made strange'¹².

PART I: SIEGE ICONOLOGY

The iconology of the siege is a vast topic in itself. Consequently, for reasons of practicality only a selection of images and icons are presented below. The language utilised by *blokadniki* comprises of a unique vocabulary which describes the paraphernalia of an improvised existence. The earlier chapter covering myth quotes Svetlana Boym's statement that communities are founded upon an 'unspoken realm of cultural myths' that protects the 'imagined' community from

¹² See also L.M O' Toole and Ann Shukman, *Russian Poetics in Translation*, Vol. 4, Formalist Theory (Oxford: Holdan Books Ltd., 1977), pp. 84 - 88 and Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman, editors, *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994).

outsiders'¹³. The 'imagined' community of which *blokadniki* are a part expresses itself not only through commemorative events but through language itself. This vocabulary separates *blokadniki* not only from younger generations of Russians but from all other Great Patriotic War veterans. It reflects the uniqueness of their pasts.

As stated in the chapter examining siege historiography there is no siege in history which is comparable in length or magnitude. Correspondingly, a language emerges which is constructed predominantly around foodstuffs. Even the entire war effort is often sidelined in siege testimony taking second place to simple phrases such as, *sladkaia zemlia* (sweet earth), *pishchevaia tselliulosa* (edible cellulose), *varit'* *studen'* (cooking jellied soup) and *stoliarni klei* (joiner's glue). *Sladkaia zemlia* refers to the earth dug up by Leningraders following the bombing of the Badaev warehouses. It is a notable example of Boym's 'unspoken realm of cultural myths'. It need only be uttered within the context of siege testimony for a whole range of meanings and significations to arise¹⁴.

It is clear that these phrases became structural pillars around which *blokadniki* can elaborate their personal experiences. For example, Tat'iana Letenkova and Aleksandra Arkhipova would link the phrases above with individual cameos or stories. Each *blokadnik* has their own story emanating from these food substitutes. But above all the *kusochek khleba* (or morsel of bread) takes

¹³ Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, p. 1.

¹⁴ See also, 'The Red Eclipse: The Myth of the Badaev Warehouses'.

precedence. These words represent the apex of suffering during the winter months of 1941–42 following the cut in rations to a daily amount of 125 grams on 20 November. It is a signifier which takes pride of place above all others.

The precedence of words and phrases describing food substitutes reflects an obvious concern with nourishment. As stated below the taste of these dishes is still apprehended with a sense of wonder. The symbolism is obvious. As Leningraders such as Letenkova, Rozanova and Velezhova sat down to eat *studen'* or *duranda* their delight was mixed with a sense of relief. They were acutely aware that these simple unprepossessing dishes were inextricably linked with their survival. Consequently, the significations of such basic phrases such as *varit studen'* far outweigh their initial meaning.

KUSOCHEK KHLEBA/ 125 GRAMS

*'Bednyi Leningradskii lomтик khleba –
On pochti ne vesit na ruke...'*

*'Leningrad's meager morsel of bread –
It's presence almost imperceptible in the hand...'*

Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *'Razgovor s Sosedkoi'* (Conversation with a Neighbour)
5 December, 1941¹⁵.

It is to be expected that food is a constant theme in siege testimonies. Not only did attitudes towards food change but the contents of Leningraders' diet was transformed.

¹⁵ Ol'ga Berggol'ts, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Trëkh tomakh, Tom Vtoroi, Khudozhestvennaia Literatura* (Leningrad: Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1973), II, p. 38.

Among the various constituents of their diet were chervil, coltsfoot, orache, potato peelings, hearts of cabbages abandoned in fields, margarine substitute, paste from book bindings and above all, the small black pieces of bread which resembled the taste of cardboard in the mouth.

Viktoriia Ruslanova exclaimed, 'Me? Myself I just could not eat it'¹⁶. Tat'iana Letenkova recalled that it was 'Black, very black'¹⁷. A recurring feature of these testimonies is the desire to demonstrate just how small this morsel of bread was. *Blokadniki* are aware that as a daily ration it was insufficient. Ol'ga Rozanova was diligent in reading out each individual ingredient recalling that only a small percentage of the recipe consisted of actual flour¹⁸.

Roland Barthes writes that, 'In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences...' ¹⁹ In the museum *A muzy ne molchali* there is a small black rectangle piece of bread representing the ration of 125 grams. In the same glass case are children's dolls and beside them sits a *burzhuika*²⁰. It is a perfect representation of siege iconography which 'abolishes the complexity of human acts' and replaces it with a few sacred objects pregnant with potent symbolic power.

¹⁶ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 13.

¹⁷ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 11.

¹⁸ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 156.

²⁰ The museum *A muzy ne molchali* is on Kazanskaia Ulitsa, house no.48, St. Petersburg.

This 'simplicity of essences' is primarily sigmatic. The words 125 grams possess a verbal symbolism which is represented through a series of accompanying representative signs. It is arguably difficult and often painful for *blokadniki* to recount the exact details of their suffering. The words 125 grams therefore express succinctly the essence of their struggle to survive. By reiterating these words to one another they also confirm a sense of *sostradanie* or co-suffering which again is based on unspoken assumptions. Consequently, it is very important for *blokadniki* during interviews that the symbolism of these words is understood. The phrase is also often accompanied by gestures which emphasise the tiny proportions of this *kusochek khleba*.

The number 125 or *sto dvadtsat' piat'* therefore encapsulates Barthes' definition of that 'simplicity of essences' and it subsequently becomes a key refrain in siege testimony. Ol'ga Rozanova even referred to 125 grams when speaking of other periods of the siege when the ration was considerably higher. Several other respondents made similar remarks. Therefore, this phrase is not uttered in an entirely factual manner. Yet, this is arguably less relevant than the manner in which these words are *used*.

As stated in the chapter examining myth and sacrality Northrop Frye underlined that it is most 'fruitful to study what in fact myths have been *made* to mean'²¹. Through using the amount of 125 grams as an initial point of reference *blokadniki* can then proceed feeling secure that their subsequent discussions about food will all

²¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, p. 341.

be understood in relation to this starvation ration. This is why it is even repeated at seemingly unrelated points in the dialogue. It is also suffused with sacred values to such an extent that it can describe siege life in its entirety. For *blokadniki*, the siege is not primarily about the gargantuan struggle between Fascism and Communism but about *sto dvadsat' piat'*. Consequently, the small black *kusochek khleba* becomes perhaps the most potent icon of the siege in that its 'very simplicity helps it condense multiple narratives into a single gestalt'²².

The words *sto dvadsat' piat'* stand at the centre of a web of food orientated topics. Food was also the motivator for acts of theft, violence and bribery. Within the context of siege testimonies it can even mean human flesh. Therefore the topic of food touches upon the darkest aspects of siege life. It is both, 'sacred and defiled' and expresses the essential duality inherent in Agamben's concept of the sacred. Mark Mathuray reminds us that the *homo sacer* is both the 'mythic hero and the sacrificial victim'²³. While Leningraders subsequently became eulogised in Soviet historiography as mythic heroes, at the time of the siege the possibility of becoming sacrificial victims was very real.

²² W. J. T Mitchell, 'The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror', *ELH: journal of English literary history*, 72:2 (Summer 2005), 291-308 (p. 305).

²³ Mark Mathuray, 'Realizing the Sacred: Power and Meaning in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*' (p. 48).

FOOD AND THE ULTIMATE TABOO

Viktor Lodkin and Natalia Velezhova recalled that their mothers were stout in build. As stated above Velezhova's mother feared even to step out onto the streets in case she was kidnapped. Velezhova's testimony began differently from any of the other interviews. The remainder opened their narratives usually with an account of the first days of the siege. Velezhova, on the other hand, began by stating that above all her deepest fear during the siege had been of cannibals.

She elaborated upon this topic by stating that 'My mother was stout. Because she was stout she could not go out on the streets. I had to do everything, collecting water and so on. Outside the bakers people killed one another. They stole bread and ran away. Our neighbour tried to kill his sister-in-law. People became psychotic, they lost their minds with the hunger'.

'There were two camps, they would round these people up and take them away there. All of them died because humans cannot eat human meat. The chief of police warned that eating the heads of cats and human flesh was forbidden. If you ate me now the same would happen to you. These people just died off by themselves',²⁴.

Tat'iana Letenkova and Ol'ga Rozanova admitted to having heard about trade in human flesh. Letenkova related, 'Then mama found out from a friend that

²⁴ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 19.

a man was selling meat at the market. Mama and I got two small pieces of meat from him. These were small pieces of rosy coloured meat. Possibly it was human meat. We thought it was maybe rabbit but I don't think these pieces of meat were rabbit. Maybe it was rabbit...I don't know'²⁵.

Aleksandra Demidova recalled the relatively common sight of flesh cut out of a human thigh. 'I walked to the tram stop. There was a corpse there. A huge chunk had been cut out of the thigh. This was because this is the most nutritious part of the body'²⁶.

Ol'ga Rozanova had a similar experience. 'I believe, that if you read the newspapers or books there is absolutely nothing written about this...that there was cannibalism. Unfortunately, there was a lot of this about. My father died on 13 January 1942. I did not go to bury him but my sister, cousin and mother went. He was buried deep under the ground. You had to give them (the undertakers) bread for this. Money meant absolutely nothing; you had to give them your day's ration in order to get someone buried deep in the ground. The temperature plummeted to 25 below and further, the winter of 1941-42 was awful... I went there two days afterwards and saw a dead woman lying there...you see, many people did not have the strength to take their relatives to the cemetery or to have them buried. There was a dead woman there. She had a piece cut out of her thigh – they had cut out the flesh'²⁷.

²⁵ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 8.

²⁶ This meeting took place in St. Petersburg in November 2001, transcript, p. 2.

²⁷ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 10.

Rozanova had a school friend who came perilously close to becoming a victim.

She had been absent for some days and returned to school with her head in bandages. Her fellow pupils crowded round her curious to know what had happened. The girl recounted how her neighbour had hit her over the head and tried to drag her under the bed. She was to be kept there and eaten later. Somehow she scrambled out of the 1st floor window and escaped. The neighbour was subsequently arrested and shot.

Rozanova, like Letenkova asserted that human meat was available. She recalled rumours about hospital canteens for wounded soldiers where large casseroles fed to the patients contained meat of human origin. She also cited the story of a family friend, Vadim Izdamov who went to the Arbatskii District one day. He was desperate for a cigarette and a smoke and somehow also acquired a meat patty. He lit his *papiros*' (cheap paper cigarette) and tucked into the patty to discover that its quality was suspect. He then realised it was human meat²⁸.

Arkhipova stated simply, 'Yes, unfortunately there was a lot of this. A lot'²⁹.

Yet there is one particular point of disputation concerning this topic. Harrison Salisbury stated that the hub of this shadowy activity took place at the Haymarket or *Sennaia Ploshchad*'. Several *blokadniki* interviewed for this study fiercely disputed this. Igor' Suvorov asserted that, 'For people to engage in such acts in the open light of day would have been absolutely impossible. At that time they would have been quickly rounded up and shot'³⁰. Rozanova was

²⁸ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11.

²⁹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 6.

³⁰ Interview with James Clapperton, March 2006, Newcastle, transcript, p. 4.

adamant that ‘This kind of thing absolutely did not happen in the centre of town. It happened only on the outskirts of the city’³¹.

Recent studies suggest that the prevalence of cannibalism should not be overestimated. Boris Belozerov’s statistics confirming that instances of cannibalism and criminality were remarkably low during the siege have already been cited³². Daniil Granin and Ales’ Adamovich, like Belozerov mention the existence of a special NKVD brigade formed to investigate instances of cannibalism. Natalia Velezhova maintained that cannibals were rounded up by these detachments³³. Yet, even in the recent 2003 edition of *Blokadnaia Kniga* the number of stories focussing upon this topic are remarkably small. As regards the disputation cited above Letenkova’s experience sounds very plausible. The existence of such speculators probably passed through word of mouth and any exchanges would have been conducted swiftly and unobtrusively.

What is most notable is Velezhova’s statement that ‘All of them died...’

Ol’ga Rozanova was also adamant about this: ‘Not *one* of these people (cannibals) survived the war. Absolutely not. I have certainly not encountered

³¹ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11.

³² Boris Belozerov, ‘Crime during the Siege’, in *Life and Death in Besieged Leningrad, 1941-44*, 213-28, p. 223 and pp. 226-27. Refer also to, ‘Between Myth and History: Siege Historiography’, p. 44.

³³ Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 490.

any’³⁴. Velezhova explained that the onset of psychosis was the main reason for cannibalism. Once begun, mental psychosis led inevitably to death. Viktor Lodkin agreed: ‘My father was a strong man, a sportsman. But he disappeared. One night I sat there looking into his eyes and it was a horrible image. From his eyes came this madness, madness from the starvation. He was gone...just gone’³⁵.

The possibility that former cannibals could have survived the blockade is too disturbing a reality for these *blokadniki* to countenance. Certainly, the fact that even a minority of respondents were willing to discuss this topic demonstrates a small shift in siege narrative. Cannibalism is gradually emerging as an operative theme in contemporary siege testimony. Yet, veterans are aware that until relatively recently these discussions would have been strictly prohibited.

Vera Liudino’s experiences are a notable example. She was sent to the gulag for six years after NKVD officers seized her diary. She was handicapped and had simply recorded daily events taking place outside her window. Her diary referred to acts of cannibalism committed by a neighbouring Tatar family and was judged as ‘anti-Soviet’. She stated later that, ‘When you see how NKVD people kick a person to death, its completely different from seeing people dying from hunger’³⁶.

³⁴ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 11.

³⁵ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 22.

³⁶ Irina Titova, ‘They felt the Hunger Pangs but Survived the Cruel Siege’.

Not only was food connected with the ultimate taboo and therefore linked with the realm of the accursed and the defiled it also created tensions within the community. Velezhova recalled that the bread shop was a place of theft and murders. Letenkova remembered that her mother worked in the local bakery.

The bakers became well aware that bread was now a precious resource. Letenkova remembered her aunt bartering possessions in return for bread and even stated that people often traded religious icons for food. One day Letenkova went to the baker's house. 'I asked myself: 'My God! Where did you get these things? It was like the Hermitage!''³⁷ She stated that it was common that certain people took advantage of the situation by collecting works of art and antiques.

Velezhova's recollection of the bakers as a place of violence and murder is confirmed by various other statements by survivors. Apollon Davidson witnessed people in the bread queue watching the baker with eagle eyes as he weighed out each ration³⁸. In *Blokadnaia Kniga* the teenager Iurii Raibinkin recalls in his diary that he even became suspicious of his mother as she shared out the small *kusochki*³⁹.

Above all, there was an intense fear of someone stealing your bread. Correspondingly, the bread queue was a place of mutual mistrust and heightened vigilance. Salman Gorelik recalls his bread ration even being snatched by an elderly lady while another survivor Andrei Vasilievskii stated that teenage boys were often the culprits⁴⁰.

³⁷ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 15.

³⁸ Vladimir Tol'ts, 'Tsena Pobedy'.

³⁹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 346.

⁴⁰ Artem Drabkin, interview with Salman Khaimovich Gorelik, (date not provided) <www.iremember.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005]. Anna Vasilievskiaia, 'Kniga o Zhizni'.

Gorelik also recalled seeing a woman collapse and die in the bread queue. Her passing went unnoticed and people simply stepped over her body as they progressed up the line.

Letenkova's assertion that bread became a valuable form of currency is also supported by published testimonies. Lev Uspenskii recalled that a crumb of bread could even buy you a ticket to a concert or a theatrical production⁴¹. Ol'ga Rozanova's experience at the cemetery is also shared by fellow *blokadniki*. This is explored in more detail in the section entitled '*Sanochki*' but gravediggers became well known for demanding bread in return for burial. Granin and Adamovich cite the experience of Galina Bobinskaia who was forced to hand over 300 rubles and a kilo of bread to a gravedigger before her adopted son could be appropriately interred⁴².

Nevertheless, food is also associated with acts of kindness and self sacrifice. It bridges the accursed and the sacred through memories which recall its power to create both disharmony and unity. When Letenkova first sat down to eat *duranda* she recalled her sheer joy. 'I said that I want to eat *duranda* and only *duranda* for the rest of my life!'⁴³. Arkhipova associated one particularly nutritious *studen'* with the day a soldier turned up at the door. There had been an air raid and a horse was killed by a falling shell. The soldier came to their

⁴¹ Lev Vasil'evich Uspenskii, '*Zapiski Starogo Peterburzhitsa, Dvadsat' Piat' Let Spustia*', passage entitled '*Terpsikhora*' <www.fictionbook.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

⁴² *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 147-48.

⁴³ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 8.

door with the horse's head. Arkhipova's mother then made *studen'* from it:

'I had never tasted anything so delicious', exclaimed Arkhipova⁴⁴.

She, Letenkova and others recalled various strange tastes associated with siege life. Nettles, wild grasses, sunflower seeds and soya products all became highly valued staples of a series of improvised dishes. Both Letenkova and Arkhipova knew that in peacetime *duranda* or *studen'* would hardly have been considered delicacies. Yet, the taste remains vivid and the symbolism associated with these occasions runs much deeper than the names of the actual ingredients themselves.

Rozanova recalled another story where one particular taste had bad associations. She had been out in the fields and was overjoyed to find some discarded beets. She brought them home only to realise after they were cooked that they were animal fodder and inedible. She wept at the dinner table as she felt she had let her family down⁴⁵. Tastes and smells can therefore enter the 'hauntology' of siege memories. For Anastasia Mutovkina it is the smell of bread itself which brings back a *flashbulb* memory. It transports her to 29 January 1942 when the bakery across from her flat reopened after several days. The air and streets were filled with the odour of freshly baked bread⁴⁶.

A number of respondents recalled bread sharing rituals and the careful rationing out of morsels of bread over the day. Again, this is confirmed by published

⁴⁴ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 7.

⁴⁵ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 8. See also p. 135.

⁴⁶ Anastasia Mikhailovna Mutovkina, '*Otblek Vechnogo Ognia*'.

testimonies. Rimma Mikhailovna stunned her family at a New Year's gathering in 1942 by giving out tiny parcels of bread as presents⁴⁷. Over the preceding weeks she had somehow managed to set aside enough bread so that she could share it out amongst her family at a later point. Zhanna Umanskaia remembers her mother hiding bread in a suitcase to make sure the children did not eat it all at once⁴⁸.

A particularly touching story concerns the experience of Irina Kireeva who was placed in a childrens' home during the siege. She recalls one particular night when the girl in the bed next to her announced that she would not live until the morning. This girl offered Kireeva her tiny ration which was hidden under her pillow. As the girl slept Kireeva faced a moral dilemma. What would happen if she took it and ate it and the girl did not die? In the end she could not bring herself to take it despite her hunger. In the morning the girl was dead, but the *kusochek khleba* remained untouched⁴⁹.

Referring to instances of cannibalism Natalia Velezhova still maintained that 'Despite it all many people had a very strong conscience. They were very disciplined'⁵⁰. While society was fraying at the edges as a result of the desire to obtain food there are also instances which strongly back up Velezhova's statement.

⁴⁷ Galina Nikolaeva, '*Shto podarit' tebe rodnaia?*'

⁴⁸ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 211-12.

⁴⁹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 201.

⁵⁰ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 19.

Grigorii Tverskoi was standing in the bread queue when he witnessed the delivery truck being blown to pieces by a falling incendiary bomb. He noticed how the crowd was frozen in disbelief as they found themselves surrounded by fresh loafs. Tverskoi still recalls the smell of these warm *bukhanki*. Yet he maintains that everyone just stood still until officials hurriedly arrived and gathered up the priceless cargo. 'Not one person moved'⁵¹.

Bread lay at the centre of *blokadnikis'* hopes and fears. Aleksandra Arkhipova said, 'We believed in our government because each increase in rations that was promised subsequently took place'⁵². Even the slightest changes in rationing were regarded as seismic events. Andrei Vasilievskii hoped at one point that the allocation of just 'a little more bread' meant that the siege would be broken⁵³. Ivan Kudrin stated that there was a point when you had to put all your faith and reliance on the basic ration card⁵⁴. The allocation of *rabochie kartochki* was of particular significance as it meant that an individual was considered a worker, and was therefore entitled to increased rations.

Bread even entered the realms of the unconscious. Adamovich and Granin state that many people shared common dreams in which they would be on the point of eating a piece of bread only to have it snatched away⁵⁵. As much of their energy

⁵¹ *Leningradskie Blokadniki*, Megapolis Org.

⁵² BL1/ JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8.

⁵³ Anna Vasilievskaja, '*Kniga o Zhizni*'...

⁵⁴ Ivan Kudrin, '*Zhivy, Vyderzhim, Pobedim, Nepredumannyye Rasskazy o Voine*', *Rodina*, no.4, <www.pobeda.ru/biblioteka/pravda.html> [accessed 5/06/2005].

⁵⁵ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 83.

during the day was focused primarily on obtaining or conserving their rations it is not surprising that thoughts of bread spilled over into night time reveries. Consequently, whether awake or asleep, Leningraders could not escape the power of the *kusochek khleba*.

D. Vance Smith states that the everyday consists of 'a mediating system that both structures experience and practices and is itself structured by practices'⁵⁶. Yet our concept of the everyday separates this term from that which is extraordinary or unusual. One of the most notable aspects of these testimonies is how mundane objects or foodstuffs become the catalysts for stories ranging from topics such as cannibalism, theft and murder to acts of altruism and self-sacrifice. Bread stories tend to become polarised between these two extremes. Consequently, bread as a signifier is released from its everyday associations which are largely taken for granted. It becomes one of the 'ultimate signifiers' of siege testimony.

Ernst Wolfgang writes that 'It is obvious that objects have histories or, rather, that their textual and inter-textual "lives" are embedded in stories about their creation (whether human or divine) and about the owners or viewers whose identity and status they help to define'⁵⁷. If there is any single object which helps to define siege experience it is the small black *kusochek khleba*.

⁵⁶ D. Vance Smith, 'Irregular Histories: Forgetting Ourselves', *New Literary History*, 28: 2 (Spring 1997) 161-84 (p. 162).

⁵⁷ Wolfgang Ernst, 'Modular Readings (Writing the Monument): The Case of the Lapis Satricanus', *Rethinking History*, 3:1 (1999), 53-74 (p. 53).

BURZHUIKA

*‘V osadnykh chernykh, medlennykh nochakh,
pod plach siren i orudiinyi grokhot,
v ikh samodel’nikh vremennykh pechakh
dola sgorela tselaia epokha’.*

*‘In those dark endless siege nights,
Beneath the wailing sirens and thundering cannons,
Their makeshift homemade stoves,
Burnt an entire epoch to the ground’.*

Ol’ga Berggol’ts, *Leningradskaia Osen’* (Leningrad Autumn), October 1942⁵⁸.

The tiny iron stove christened the *burzhuika* occupies a place of honour in the museum *A muzy ne Molchali*. Despite its unprepossessing appearance this stove has come to represent almost the entire siege. Its small jaws held the balance between life and death in besieged Leningrad and for much of that first winter it remained the only source of warmth for the populace.

The journalist Iurii Zakharovich recently discussed its symbolism in an article entitled: *Bring Back the Burzhuika!* Zakharovich identifies two etymological sources for the stove. The first stems from the word *burzhui* or bourgeois and recalls the dark days of the civil war when the bourgeoisie became reliant on these tiny ovens for heat. The second meaning emanating from the word *burzhui* denotes its

⁵⁸ Ol’ga Berggol’ts, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Trekh tomakh...*, p. 78.

remarkable ability to consume large amounts of firewood and other kindling with apparently little return. It consequently gives warmth to the few while the others sitting further away from the stove remain cold. This has obvious connotations with the belief that the bourgeoisie enjoy various privileges which are withheld from the majority.

Zakharovich writes that ‘The *burzhuika* has become a real symbol of Russian misery, despondency and collapse — and stubborn survival against all the odds. I still keep a *burzhuika* at my dacha’. Yet the *burzhuika* has also come to symbolise contemporary Russia. Zakharovich notes that, ‘now that gas mains are bursting all over Siberia and the Far East, now that thousands of people are left out in the bitter cold without heat, hot water and often electricity, now that *burzhuika* chimneys are disfiguring the face of Russia once again like smallpox marks, I do not see my little cast iron stove as a piece of *curiosa* any longer’. For Zakharovich the state Duma’s promise of the 1990’s to bring back the era of the *burzhui* or ‘hardworking capitalist’ has brought back the era of the *burzhuika* and of widespread hardship⁵⁹.

This article demonstrates the ongoing myth/symbol complex which surrounds this mundane object. It represents ideology by signifying both the greed of the bourgeoisie and their subsequent humiliation following the revolution. In times of hardship it could even symbolise the suffering of the Russian people as a whole and their will to survive ‘against all the odds’.

⁵⁹ Iurii Zakharovich, ‘Bring back the Burzhuika!’ *Time Europe*, January 15 2001
<www.time.com/time/europe/webonly/europe/2001/01/yuri.html> [accessed 28/03/2006].

Rodric Braithwaite notes that the people of Moscow also resorted to using the *burzhuika* during the critical opening months of the war. He goes on to say that it 'had kept the bourgeoisie warm during the bad days of the Civil War'⁶⁰. Nevertheless, the *burzhuika* remains more closely linked with the siege of Leningrad than with any other historical event or location. *Blokadnaia Kniga* opens with a depiction of the home of a *blokadnik* where the symbolism of the *burzhuika* is placed centre stage. 'Imagine yourself to be a soldier, who lives in the reality of today but who is surrounded by those walls and objects which constantly bring back life in the *zemlianka* and in the trench. Traces of shrapnel marks on the ceiling, shards of glass embedded in the piano and scorch marks from the *burzhuika* which blemish the sparkling parquet floor'⁶¹. They enter the flat of Lidiia Usova who asks, 'Do you see that yellow stain? No one paints over that because that was where the *burzhuika* stood'⁶². Not only the *burzhuika* itself but even traces of its presence are considered sacred and untouchable. To erase them would be tantamount to painting over memories of the siege itself.

Svetlana Gachina discussed the resonance of the *burzhuika* at length during her interview. Leningrad's windows had been shattered by the relentless destruction caused by falling *zazhigalki* (incendiary bombs). Plywood was subsequently used to block out the cold while makeshift vents snaked out of these windows and up the sides of buildings. The smoke of countless *burzhuiki* billowed out into the streets of freezing silent Leningrad. Sometimes this smoke would be the only outward indication of life.

⁶⁰ Rodric Braithwaite, *Moscow 1941: A city and its people at war* (London: Profile Books, 2006), p. 239.

⁶¹ *Blokadnaia Kniga, Chast' Pervaia*, p. 17.

⁶² *Blokadnaia Kniga, Chast' Pervaia*, pp. 17-18.

Gachina recalled that 'Everyone had *burzhuichki* at home...this was a tiny iron oven. My family, we were five people in all. We did not live in this room (the sitting room) but went through there to the kitchen and that dark cubbyhole. We lived there because shrapnel could fly in through the front window...There was no central heating so the *burzhuichka* kept us warm...We burnt chairs, furniture and books. What a library we burnt. My family lived here since the 19th century and everything is lost. Everything was burnt in that little stove'⁶³.

In fact, not everything was lost. She was immensely proud of the grand piano in her front room which had 'lived through three revolutions'. Nevertheless, there are echoes in this narrative of what Gabriele Rosenthal terms, 'the threshold of the present'⁶⁴. This refers to a traumatic lifetime event which has disjointed the past from the present. For Holocaust survivors this moment occurred as they stepped off the trains carrying them to the extermination camps. For example, the Auschwitz survivor Tamara Genzor stated that when she arrived in Auschwitz 'that meant the end of everything. That's what it is. That is my past, in Auschwitz when we got out of the trains'⁶⁵. Life could simply never be perceived in the same way as before.

Svetlana Gachina observed that the *burzhuika* was a devourer of memories as well as a giver of life. As quoted above Natalia Velezhova shared these experiences.

⁶³ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 4. '*Burzhuichka*' translates as a small, or 'wee' *burzhuika*.

⁶⁴⁻⁶⁵ Gabriele Rosenthal, Petra Jordans and Bettina Voelter, 'Surviving together and living apart in Israel and West Germany: the Genzor Family', in *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, 32-50, p. 33.

She emphasised the fact that possessions were of secondary importance to obtaining warmth. Yet, Tat'iana Letenkova expressed a sense of frustration that this tiny oven could only warm up one part of the body while the rest of her remained cold⁶⁶. Viktoriia Ruslanova recalled how she and her siblings huddled together near oven plates at night trying to obtain the warmth of the stove⁶⁷. All these experiences appear to underline the dual significance of the *burzhuika*. As Leningraders huddled around for warmth, they also watched their pasts disappear through its jaws.

These sentiments are also shared by other survivors. Anel' Shuster recalled watching as his family's antique oak furniture went up in flames and he particularly regrets the loss of a 'beautiful carving'⁶⁸. Parisa Kaan remembers the moment that there was no furniture left. Nothing remained except her brother's violin and her uncle's mandolin. The violin was only saved when his brother passed out while trying to smash it over his knee. He was simply too weak to destroy it⁶⁹.

One story which was unlikely to meet with official Soviet approval concerns Andrei Vasilievskii and his mother. As he looked around in a desperate effort to find things to burn Vasilievskii came across his brother's six volume collection of the complete works of Lenin. His brother had been presented with the collection after completing his studies but had, in the words of Vasilievskii, 'never opened it

⁶⁶ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 6.

⁶⁷ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 11.

⁶⁸ Anel' Shuster, '*Leningradskie Blokadniki*', *Megapolis Org* c. 1996-2002, Israeli Internet Newspaper (same as above).

⁶⁹ Parisa Kaan, '*Leningradskie Blokadniki*', *Megapolis Org* c. 1996-2002.

once'. Vasilievskii, aware of the irony begged for Lenin's forgiveness.

Fortunately, the red volumes burned very well and he fell asleep while his mother continued to feed the *burzhuika* well into the night⁷⁰.

Letenkova recalled that her skirt caught fire and this underlines the fact that these stoves could be very dangerous⁷¹. The soprano Galina Vishnevskaiia shared a flat with her grandmother which had once been the home of an admiral. The admiral's wardrobes and tables all went through the mouth of the *burzhuika*. One night her grandmother fell asleep and the hem of her dress caught fire. She was severely burned and died in hospital several days later⁷². The *burzhuika*, while undoubtedly a treasured memento of siege life, also embodies the essential ambivalence of the sacred.

The *burzhuika* could also function as a congregation point. Iraida Starikova remembers entire families huddled around the *burzhuika*, the icicles on the windowsills and the flumes of the stoves reaching up and out through windows⁷³. Nina Zakharova emphasised that the cold and darkness outside mattered little compared with the knowledge that they were 'safe and together'. She also stated that for this reason 'this time was very dear to us'⁷⁴. Having burnt most if not all of their books Leningraders would have been forced to rely on conversation

⁷⁰ Anna Vasilievskaiia, '*Kniga o Zhizni...*

⁷¹ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 6.

⁷² Galina Vishnevskaiia, *A Russian Story*, p. 42.

⁷³ Iraida Vasilievna Starikova, '*Kofe*' iz *Sladkou Zemli, Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine*'.

⁷⁴ Nina Aleksandrovna Zakharova, '*Vo imia budushchego*'.

to pass away the hours. Consequently, the *burzhuika* could strengthen familial bonds. Harrison Salisbury confirms this by quoting the naval writer Aleksandr Kron: 'Never had people talked so much and so openly, never had they argued so strongly, as during long evenings around the *burzhuika*'⁷⁵.

Kron touches upon the myth of the 'imagined' community of wartime Leningrad. With its fragile warmth the *burzhuika* literally compelled people to huddle closer together. Correspondingly, it became a conduit for community spirit and intimacy.

James Krasner writes that, 'The memory mirror functions not through narrative but through symbol; objects allow a quick, instantaneous access to a significant experience'. He continues saying 'home thus becomes a "total environment" of self-mirroring surfaces in which virtually every object serves to "stiffen" identity'. Again, the *burzhuika* acts as a kind of conduit for past memories, its presence 're-infecting' the present with the past. Its potent symbolic place in Russian siege mythology also confirms Wolfgang Ernst's assertion that 'objects have histories'. They also have 'textual and inter-textual "lives" which help define the identity of their owners. The *burzhuika*'s significance also reminds us of how the past can be 'embodied in objects'. Therefore it is an 'object that *was* there and *is* here' which 'connects us with that *was* because it still itself *is*'⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*p. 462.

⁷⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Presence of Objects: Medieval Anti-Judaism in Modern Germany', *Common Knowledge*, 10.1 (Winter 2004), 1-32 (p. 30).

ZAZHIGALKA!

Peter Ackroyd describes how a particularly heavy night of bombing on 29 December 1940 transformed London into ‘unfamiliar territory’. He quotes one observer who stated that ‘The air felt singed’. The colours of the city changed as concrete and granite had ‘been scorched umber’ and church ruins became ‘chrome yellow’⁷⁷. The culprits were German incendiary bombs which had fallen like ‘heavy rain’ across the capital⁷⁸.

The Russians christened them *zazhigalki* or *zazhigatel'nye bomby*. The *zazhigalka* created an unpredictable atmosphere of imminent danger. Death could come at any moment. Nevertheless, there is evidence that while Leningraders remained extremely nervous of the *zazhigalka* they began to develop coping strategies. Aleksandra Arkhipova recalled that one day she saw a woman blown to pieces on the other side of the street: ‘*Bukh!* (Bang), and she was gone!’ Arkhipova, like many others who found themselves in that situation simply thought, ‘Well, at least this time it is not me’⁷⁹. Viktoriia Ruslanova had an almost identical experience. ‘I heard this whizzing sound and after it fell I walked on. There was the body of a woman lying there’⁸⁰.

⁷⁷⁻⁷⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000) p. 744 and p. 743.

⁷⁹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript p. 6. See also p. 145.

⁸⁰ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 9.

As stated earlier Elena Vishnevskaya was only seven and on her way to school when a shell landed on the *Volodarskii* bridge⁸¹. Igor' Suvorov, also a child during the siege asserted though that it was not frightening for him to see a falling shell. He recalled being more curious than terrified. He also maintained that heavy artillery shells were much more damaging to the city's architecture than incendiaries. Nevertheless, as he was evacuated in January 1942 by plane he remembered passing through a ring of fire as the aircraft flew out of Leningrad⁸².

The citizens of Kolpino were on the fringes of this ring of fire. It was notable that their testimonies focussed upon two salient themes. The first was loss of family and friends. In these cases their losses were immense. The second concerned shelling and bombing. Almost all other siege topics were mentioned only in passing.

The testimony of Viktor Oleinikov is a striking example. He spoke with some difficulty as he struggled to maintain his composure. 'My father died. My brother died...My friend was hit in the back and killed by a bomb...One day I was out walking and a plane flew overhead...shshshshshshshshshshshshshshshshsh! Then it dropped a bomb. Well, this is a terrible affair. Mama was killed. I had gone out to get some bread. I then saw corpses lying about me. No one could help. Everyone was too weak. Those that were not hit were standing and shaking. I went along the banks of the Neva and met an officer there. I told him I was all alone'⁸³.

⁸¹ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 3. .

⁸² Suvorov, transcript, p. 5.

⁸³ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 9.

The *zazhigalka* signifies a series of associations for veterans. The first association is with the heroism of teenage girls who ascended up onto the rooftops of buildings and defused *zazhigalki* by pouring sand over them. The majority of the female respondents in this study took part in these activities. The prominence of teenage girls defusing incendiaries was also noted by their male counterparts. Gennadii Kap'tsev and Salman Gorelik recall that on the rooftops they were firmly in the minority⁸⁴.

The most striking aspect of memory surrounding *zazhigalki* concerns the constant proximity of falling incendiaries. Oleinikov, like his compatriots recalled people standing and shaking during air raids. Andrei Vasilievskii describes his initial physical response to seeing his first exploding incendiary bomb. He felt a numbness in the stomach and amidst the confusion he glanced towards a lady brandishing a cross⁸⁵. Apollon Davidson was in the cinema watching '*Anton Ivanovich Serdit'sia*' (Anton Ivanovich is angry) when a bomb hit the theatre. To this day he has refused to watch the film to the end due to superstitious habit⁸⁶.

Witnessing the chaos which followed air raids has led in turn to *blokadniki* being haunted by violent scenic memories. Oleinikov recalled his friend being hit in the back. Tat'iana Letenkova recalled that 'I was standing beside this building and then a bomb came flying down. Zhzhzhzhzhzhzh! Then I saw this lady lying on the ground'⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ Artem Drabkin, interview with Salman Khaimovich Gorelik.

⁸⁵ Anna Vasilievskaya, '*Kniga o Zhizni*'.

⁸⁶ Vladimir Tol'ts, '*Tsena Pobedy*'.

⁸⁷ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 8.

These memories, due to their traumatic nature tend to be highly resistant to decay. Viktor Oleinikov's testimony was also representative of the other Kolpino narratives in that it was unelaborated. He did not accompany his account with valedictory statements. The factual data itself was sufficient testament to his suffering. His account differs sharply from Suvorov's and Vishnevskaja's. They were somewhat intrigued or curious about these events. Oleinikov, on the other hand, like Tat'iana Letenkova, felt only a sense of horror at the debris of war. Of course, it is probably also a reflection of the fact that Vishnevskaja and Suvorov were considerably younger at the time.

Published testimonies recounting similar events also cut between scenic memories of a violent nature. Again, there are no accompanying elaborations. These scenes remain fresh in the mind but they are memories which *blokadniki* understandably are reluctant to dwell upon. Lev Uspenskii, for example, is haunted by the memory of seeing a child's limbs being blown off, while Tat'iana Chertkova witnessed a woman continue to take several steps after her head was severed during an air raid⁸⁸.

The Kolpino veterans were enraged by the targeting of civilians. The former workers at the *Elektrosila* plant recalled that fellow employees on their way to work were repeatedly strafed by enemy aircraft. Even childrens' schools were not exempt. Marina Kostrova remembers the destruction of her school, while Nina Rogova was

⁸⁸ Lev Vasil'evich Uspenskii, 'Zapiski Starogo Peterburzhitsa, Dvadsat' Piat' Let Spustia'. Tat'iana Chertkova, 'Zhenshchiny Plakali Gliadia Na Nas'.

sitting in class with her schoolmates when shells suddenly started exploding.

She recalls the windows being shattered and that 'It took all my strength to stop shaking'⁸⁹.

Irina Efremova stated that there was a rumour about a train which had been hit while attempting to evacuate civilians out of Leningrad. She and her colleagues in the *Elektrosila* plant underlined that such rumours made Leningraders much more reluctant to sign up for evacuation. Efremova's assertions are backed up by published accounts. Nina Zakharova expressed her anger at the deliberate shelling and strafing of lines of children being evacuated across lake Ladoga⁹⁰. Mariia Motovskaia was one of the officials who escorted a train packed full of children towards Luchkovo. Tragically, Luchkovo fell directly in the path of advancing German divisions. Motovskaia was astonished to see low flying pilots on a clear day strafe lines of children⁹¹.

While many Leningraders simply stayed at home or stopped motionless on the streets during raids, others depict aspects of life in the bomb shelter. Aleksandr Cherapukhin gave a detailed account of how tiny communities crystallised within the confines of the *bomboubezhishcha*. He recalled bunk beds and tables set aside for school children⁹². Maia Rudnitskaia remembers children taking small back sacks with

⁸⁹ Liudmila Zapozina, 'Serdtza Pomnit' <www.pobeda-60.ru>, 25 January 2001 [accessed 11/06/2005]. Nina Rogova, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 193.

⁹⁰ Nina Aleksandrovna Zakharova, 'Vo imia budushchego'.

⁹¹ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 264.

⁹² BL8/JC/ 109/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

clothes and favourite toys or dolls to the shelter just in case their homes were destroyed during a raid⁹³. The veteran Mikhail Kuraev even recalled that his mother gave birth to his baby brother while sheltering from an air raid⁹⁴.

The shelling was so intense that the survival of key buildings began to be seen at times as divine providence. Even the *zazhigalka* appeared to be controlled and sometimes thwarted by unseen forces. For Svetlana Gachina it was her beloved Music Conservatory which, 'Thanks be to God' was not directly hit by a large incendiary⁹⁵. Rav Zusia stated that although his local synagogue was targeted by German positions on the Pulkovo heights it was hit only once⁹⁶. Valerii Lianin was attending vespers when the windows of his church were shattered by incendiaries. The fact that no bomb had landed directly on the church was interpreted by leading members of the congregation as a sign that God had 'led the German pilot away'⁹⁷. All these events, while attributable to sheer chance only accentuated a general tendency for mythic production. Understandably, Leningraders were looking for 'signs' which could be interpreted as evidence of some divine providence.

One of the most notable examples of these myths was the case of Radio House. Today, the small black speaker mounted on its walls remains one of the few obvious remnants of the siege. Lev Markhasev recalled the myth that Radio House

⁹³ Irina Titova, 'Doll Display Reflects Child's View of Siege', *St. Petersburg Times*, 23 January 2004 <www.sptimes.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

⁹⁴ Mikhail Kuraev, '*Kusochek ada, ili mat' neizvestnogo blokadnika*', *Rodina*, no.1, 2003 <www.istrodina.com> [accessed 5/06/2005].

⁹⁵ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Aleksei Elkin, '*Zashchitnik Leningrada*', interview with Rav Zusia for the *Agensstvo Evreivskikh Novostei* <www.aen.ru> (no date provided) [accessed 16/11/2005].

⁹⁷ Valerii Lianin, '*U Nikh Ostavalas' Tol'ko Nadezhda*'.

had once been the site of the Japanese consulate and that it had been built upon special lead foundations. There was a rumour that an original gold slab existed marking the building's initial construction but a later excavation of some of the foundations led to nothing. Nevertheless, the belief that Radio House would never be destroyed was, according to Markhasev commonly believed by the Radio staff ⁹⁸.

There is no definitive proof that this gold foundation slab exists but the myth that Radio House was somehow 'safe' was a very useful one. Presumably, the staff at Radio House would have found it considerably harder to fulfil their duties within an atmosphere of constant foreboding. Correspondingly, the myth of divine protection and its continued invocation amongst staff made the fulfilment of daily duties much easier.

The *zazhigalka* symbolises the heroism of the women and children who defused countless devices on rooftops but also the unpredictability of everyday life in besieged Leningrad. It came to represent the essence of Fascist brutality as it rained down upon schools and private residences. The respondents who took part in this study portrayed instances of shelling and the killing and maiming of civilians without any recourse to mythic production. The facts themselves were clearly regarded as sufficient within this context. While the *zazhigalka* maintains its malevolent iconic force it is not the source of extended myth production.

Oleinikov's account in particular, demonstrates why this is the case.

⁹⁸ Lev Markhasev, 'Sud'ba Doma Radio', *Neva*, no.9, 2003, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 9/06/2005].

SNOW

Quoted above are the words of Natalia Velezhova as she described the extreme temperatures of late 1941. 'I was born in Leningrad. I have lived here all my life but I never have seen such cold as during that winter'⁹⁹. Tat'iana Letenkova remembered fetching water through the ice holes in the Neva. 'We lived close to the Neva. I made my way over the ice of the Neva which was very uneven. The cold was wild...cruel'¹⁰⁰.

During the interviews the topics of snow, ice and above all bitter temperatures were usually discussed during the opening passages of the dialogue. It became evident that these survivors were very concerned about conveying their memories of the cold and the snow. The fact that this was the coldest winter in living memory was reiterated time and again.

For Ol'ga Rozanova the cold belonged to that, 'simplicity of essences' which defined siege life as a whole. 'What does it mean, the siege? Well, it is difficult to describe everything to you because you did not survive this. It is above all, hunger ...it is cold, because there was no electrical light for the population, this was reserved for industries involved in production for the front...now what would I like to tell you? Transport was not working, the plumbing system broke down...the cold was awful... I cannot describe it because all the people in the centre of town were practically freezing to death... I remember there were certain people who sat down in the streets, and after a little time passed simply died there'¹⁰¹.

⁹⁹ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, pp. 1-2.

Svetlana Gachina also remembered people dying amidst the snowdrifts. 'People just collapsed in the streets...and then the temperature on the street in January and February plunged to 40 below zero. The cold was absolutely unbelievable...there was no electricity, no plumbing system that functioned, simply a pipe on the corner of the street from which you could collect water. Then the streets could no longer be cleaned and mountains of snow piled up'¹⁰².

Tat'iana Letenkova felt that one of the worst aspects of the siege was the silence. She witnessed pedestrians struggling to make their way across the ice and snow. As stated earlier Elena Vishnevskaja stood at the gates of the cemetery and was struck by a kind of 'frozen silence'¹⁰³. Clearly, the sight of a major metropolis being gradually obscured by unchecked snowdrifts must have added to that sense of unreality. Again, the symbolism of the snow had a dual meaning. As stated below its blue crisp texture gave the city a certain bewitching beauty. On the other hand, each huge drift held dark secrets. It was the knowledge of these hidden corpses which haunted Tat'iana Letenkova as she made her way towards the ice holes of the Neva.

Leningraders cut icy gorges between peaks of snow which could rise up to the first and second floors of houses. Vladimir Den remembers how snowdrifts climbed well above head height. These 'snowy mountains' were pure and white, and the snow was not 'city snow', but sparkling and almost blinding to the eye¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰² BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 5.

¹⁰³ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 197.

Lidiia Okhapkina described walking along *Nevskii Prospekt*. She felt a tightness in her chest as she witnessed how eerily silent *Nevskii* had become and how the snow had engulfed stationary trams and trolleybuses¹⁰⁵. Lidiia Mel'nikova thought the area around the *Finlanskii Voksal* (Finland station) had become 'a kingdom of ice' while Nikolai Amel'ko witnessed frozen corpses 'with every step' of his daily journey. Along the second tram line 'several corpses lay at the front entrances of every building'¹⁰⁶.

Normally, city snow becomes a brown-black colour, encrusted with pieces of salt or sand from snow ploughs and is made filthy from car fumes and pollution. Yet this snow was as untouched as a virgin flurry upon an Alpine ski slope. E. Foniakova, like Vladimir Den recalled the purity of the snow and that it had a 'blue colour'¹⁰⁷. Lev Uspenskii described it as likening a pure chemical powder¹⁰⁸. Its virginity was a source of wonder and a notable manifestation of Leningrad's topography of the uncanny.

In the darkness Leningraders also began to confuse certain shapes and sights. Mounds of corpses were often mistaken for firewood. Firewood, or *drova* became almost as valuable as life itself, so the disappointment of discovering that what appeared at first to be kindling was in fact a corpse was considerable. It was also a discomfoting experience. This was recalled by Tat'iana Chertkova and Andrei Vasilievskii who both mistook corpses for firewood¹⁰⁹. Aleksandr

¹⁰⁵ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 369.

¹⁰⁶ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 197. Admiral Nikolai Nikolaevich Amel'ko, 'Chast' 2: Voina'.

¹⁰⁷ E. Foniakova, 'Utro, Nepridumanye Rasskazy o Voine'.

¹⁰⁸ Lev Vasil'evich Uspenskii, 'Zapiski Starogo Peterburzhitsa, Dvadsat' P iat' Let Spustia'.

¹⁰⁹ Tat'iana Chertkova, 'Zhenshchiny Plakali Gliadia Na Nas'.

Lodkin remembered one night when he was initially delighted to catch sight of what appeared to be a large pile of logs or kindling. He approached the apparent woodpile with the intent of picking up a few pieces to take home only to realise that it was a large mound of cadavers¹¹⁰. Leningrad had become a realm of spectres and hallucinations.

This sense of the uncanny was heightened as even the living began to resemble the dead. Letenkova recalled that peoples' faces 'went black'. Lev Uspenskii states that it was 'very uncanny' to witness 'formless, silent ghosts floating above the snow'¹¹¹. These were the same shuffling silent figures depicted by Letenkova.

Snowdrifts became coffins, corpses resembled firewood, and the living emaciated apparitions floating across the city. The realm of mortals and that of the dead had become inextricably intertwined. Srdjan Smajic identifies the ghost as 'a classic mythic figure'. Spectres are 'a haunting reflection of the Unconscious'¹¹². The sight of corpses protruding from snowdrifts must have reminded Leningraders of their own fragility. The deaths which occurred on the streets described by Ol'ga Rozanova were also quiet deaths. They occurred while people were in the midst of their daily journeys. The boundaries between life and death were therefore blurred.

¹¹⁰ Aleksandr Lodkin, '*Blokadnoe Pis'mo*'.

¹¹¹ Lev Vasil'evich Uspenskii, '*Zapiski Starogo Peterburzhitsa*'.

¹¹² Srdjan Smajic, 'The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing: Vision, Ideology, and Genre in the Victorian Ghost Story', *ELH*, 70:4 (Winter 2003), 1107-1135, (p.1108).

Smajic describes the ghost as a figure who effaces boundaries between reality and 'unhospitable, alien territory'¹¹³. As they witnessed their city begin to resemble such a forbidding territory Leningraders, as 'ghost-seers' also found themselves standing at the 'crossroads of ocularcentric faith and anti-ocularcentric scepticism'¹¹⁴. Yet, their ability to distinguish between 'optical fact and optical illusion' was hampered by their own weak physical state¹¹⁵. Hunger in itself produces hallucinations. The 'secular and the spiritual eye' had become confused as one¹¹⁶. Leningrad was a terrain where the dead and the living co-existed. It was a collision of two worlds which would normally remain separate.

¹¹³⁻¹¹⁵ Srdjan Smajic, 'The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing...' (p. 1110).

¹¹⁶ Srdjan Smajic, 'The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing...' (p. 1130).

SANOCHKI

*‘Skripiat, skripiat po Nevskomu poloz’ia.
Na detskikh sankakh, uzen’kikh, smeshnykh,
v kastril’ kakh vodu golubuiu vosiat,
dvora i skarb, umershikh i bol’nykh...’*

*‘Squeek, squeek go the sleds’ runners along Nevskii.
Children’s sleds, petite and quaint,
Carry saucepans of light blue water,
firewood and other bits and pieces,
The sick and the dead...’*

Ol’ga Berggol’ts, *Fevral’skii Dnevnik* (February Diary), January-February 1942¹¹⁷.

The children’s sled, normally symbolic of winter frolics has an entirely different significance for *blokadniki*. The majority of respondents interviewed shared the experience of the weary journey to the cemetery. The body of a close relative, often their father, would be wrapped up in a sheet, placed carefully on a sled and dragged to the graveyard. Tat’iana Letenkova found this trip terrifying. As she entered the outskirts of the city she could think only of the coming darkness. Ol’ga Rozanova was greatly relieved not to see her father’s body tossed into one of the large trenches which functioned as mass graves. ‘This was very important for us’, she confirmed¹¹⁸.

Viktor Oleinikov also dragged his father’s body to the cemetery. He recalled that ‘They did not dig the graves. They blew up the earth’¹¹⁹. This was because

¹¹⁷ Ol’ga Berggol’ts, *Sobranie Sochinenii v Trekh tomakh, Tom Vtoroi*, II, p. 52.

¹¹⁸ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ BL10/JC/09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 11.

of the frost which made it unpractical to use spades. Letenkova also remembered dragging her uncle Sasha's body to the graveyard. 'I remember the day I heard that uncle Sasha died. He had gone a black colour. During the blockade everyone's faces became black. Mama, my brother and me put uncle Sasha on a *sanochki* and pulled him alongside the canal. We walked, and walked and walked. The cemetery seemed so far. Then there were the corpses all around. God, what a lot of corpses, *sanochki* all around us',¹²⁰.

Natalia Velezhova said: 'Poor people had to drag the bodies of relatives to common graves. They were taken to *Piskarevskii* or *Serafimskoe* and other places. In what is now called the '*Park Pobedy*' (Victory Park) there was an oven. A brick factory. This was converted into a crematorium. I remember the fires and the smoke there',¹²¹.

Lidiia Blagodarova underlined that, 'It was not just about *Piskarevskii* (the city's largest cemetery) there were cemeteries in *every* district. In each one there were huge trenches and mass graves',¹²².

Harrison Salisbury noted how Leningrad's landscape became dotted with these tiny white hearses. By December 1941 'they were everywhere, on the Nevsky, on the broad boulevards, moving toward *Ulitsa Marat*, toward the *Nevskaia Lavra*, toward Piskarevsky, toward the hospitals',¹²³.

¹²⁰ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 9.

¹²¹ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 23.

¹²² BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹²³ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 days...*p. 465.

Ol'ga Rozanova's emphasis upon the importance of a proper burial is underlined by the experience of other *blokadniki* who were not so fortunate. Faina Blagodarova recalled her father wrapping her mother's body in a blanket and placing her on a sledge. She was then dragged to a pickup point where corpses were subsequently transported in trucks to unmarked graves. The thought of her mother suffering an indecent burial was deeply troubling. 'How is it that someone so dear could be cast into such a common grave? Dora (a relative) embraced father, and then, both sobbing, they turned away from this cruel spectacle'¹²⁴.

Feliks Makhov remembered transporting his father's body to the *Serafimskoe Kladbishche* (cemetery) in the northwest of the city. He recalled how the mechanical diggers dumped corpses unceremoniously on 'their backs, stomachs and sides'. He then witnessed his father being thrown on top of a pile of bodies, lying motionless like a 'black raven'. Makhov was also haunted by the image of an elderly *babushka* following a sled screaming and wailing inconsolably, 'But where do they take them? The suffering ones?'¹²⁵

Lev Anninskii portrays a typical scene as two Leningraders face one another across an icy pathway. One of them drags the body of a child on a sled while the other dodges a nearby pothole. On the wall there is a slogan instructing all citizens to transport the dead to the cemeteries¹²⁶.

¹²⁴ Faina Blagodarova, *Blokada, Oktiabr'*, no.12, 2001, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

¹²⁵ Anastasia Mikhailovna Mutovkina, 'Otblesk Vechnogo Ognia'.

¹²⁶ Lev Anninskii, *Viona, Zhenskoe litso, Druzhba Narodov* (Kritika section), 2005, no.2, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 8/06/2005].

Ivan Kudrin, like Letenkova, noted how the living began to resemble the dead.

‘Both the dead and the living were wrapped up in blankets...Then, the children’s sleds began to materialise. In the outskirts of the city abandoned corpses lay uncollected, in the streets, and on sledges...’¹²⁷ Again, the boundary between this life and the next became obscured.

It should also be stated that *sanochki* did not always have negative connotations.

Mikhail Kuraev remembers the relief expressed by his family because they owned a sled with which they could transport his dystrophic brother to the hospital¹²⁸.

Apollon Davidson recalls putting some of his belongings on a sled and making his way to the evacuation point at the Finland railway station. There he received a veritable feast of *kasha* and two sausages¹²⁹. Oleg Kuznetsov was saved by the family sled which carried him to the hospital. He became the only boy in his ward to survive¹³⁰. One of the most enduring images stems from the New Year celebrations of 1942 when weak and dystrophic children were dragged to parties in schools and private residencies¹³¹.

¹²⁷ Mikhail Kuraev, ‘*Kusochek ada, ili mat’ neizvestnogo blokadnika*’.

¹²⁸ Ivan Kudrin, ‘*Zhivy, Vyderzhim, Pobedim, Nepredumannyye Rasskazy o Voine*’.

¹²⁹ Vladimir Tol’ts, ‘*Tsena Pobedy*’.

¹³⁰ Lotta Vogopol’skaia, ‘*Put’ k Zvezdam, ‘Ia govoriu za vseh, kto prokhodil ogon’, i smert’, i led*’, *Nevskoe Vremia*, 28 January 2004 <www.nevskoevremya.spb.ru> [accessed 4/06/2005].

¹³¹ Refer for example to N. A Butina, ‘*Dostoiny stikhov I muzyka barda – blokadnaia shkola*’, *blokadnaia parta* <www.pobeda-60.ru>, 6 September, 2001 [accessed 11/11/2005].

Nevertheless, *sanochki* signify above all the image of a child's sled carrying a small corpse wrapped up in a white blanket. This image appears to encapsulate much of the personal grief and suffering of Leningraders. It symbolises unceremonious burials, unmarked graves and a myriad of tortuous journeys to the cemeteries around the city.

Jacques Derrida examined the ontological gap between the moment of witnessing and that of bearing witness. Consequently, 'pure' testimony is no longer possible. Nevertheless, he also states that 'if testimony thereby became proof, information, certainty, or archive, it would lose its function as testimony. In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted'¹³².

Sanochki haunt siege veterans because they are also associated with crossing a threshold. This threshold signifies the loss of patriarchal authority. Many of these respondents lost their fathers relatively early on during the blockade. Correspondingly, while *sanochki* are primarily associated with death, they also signify the broader feminisation of siege life.

CONCLUSION

Within the context of testimonies which relate traumatic events certain objects can have a particularly potent symbolic power. What is most notable is how mundane objects attained a whole range of significations during the siege which they did not have in peacetime. *Sanochki* became hearses, the tiny *burzhuika* became the

¹³² Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, pp. 29-30.

focus of both survival and family congregations, a tiny slice of bread could be exchanged for a valuable work of art, religious icons were regarded as a source of currency while money itself became virtually worthless. That which was prized and valued during peacetime was discarded as irrelevant during the blockade. As Natalia Velezhova states, 'Chairs, tables, shelves and books were no longer important. You just had to get warm'¹³³. Therefore, the blockade brought about an ontological shift in the ways objects were interpreted.

This is also demonstrated by the significance of the metronome. During peacetime it remained a fairly unremarkable household object. Yet, for *blokadniki* it has a terrifying significance as the harbinger of shelling and death. Tat'iana Letenkova expressed this feeling succinctly by asserting that, 'The sound of the metronome was absolutely awful! I was walking across a bridge, then there was absolute silence. Then, from radio speakers I just heard this, "tick, tick, tick". It was a cruel sound. I jumped into a trench and heard the sound of a bomb. Thank God for that trench – it saved me'¹³⁴.

Letenkova tapped her knuckle on the table in a steady beat as she recalled this experience. She felt that amidst the silence the gentle ticking of the metronome emanating from speakers mounted on street walls was particularly sinister.

Viktor Lodkin also stated that, 'Of all the sounds I remember it was the beat of the metronome'. He then, like Letenkova tapped on the table in almost exactly

¹³³ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 20. See also p. 4.

¹³⁴ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 11.

the same tempo. '*Vozdushnaia Trevoga!* Citizens! – Shelling will occur in the *Vyborgskii* district!' He recalled that, 'We survived because a bomb landed on our neighbour's house and not on ours. Everyone was in the cellar and they were killed. Well, that, I suppose is fate'¹³⁵.

Virginia Woolf wrote that, 'Any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain'¹³⁶. Daniil Granin describes this process succinctly in his beautiful little book: *Kerogaz i Vse Drugie: Leningradskii Katalog*. This book is a collection of pictures, stories and poetry which are inspired by a range of objects and images defining life in Leningrad during the last century. Beneath a tiny stove called the *kerosinka* he writes, 'for us the primus is connected with memories of the dark overcrowded, teeming *kommunalka*, kitchen quarrels and squalor...But why should the primus itself be deemed guilty for all of this?' Yet, it is inevitable that objects such as the *kerosinka* and the *burzhuika* will continue to be haunted by past association. They also play a crucial role in acts of remembrance through triggering siege memories. As Caroline Walker Bynum writes, 'There is a special sense in which, as long as the objects survive, we shall never, can never, forget'¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ BL8/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 14.

¹³⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Solid Objects', in *A Haunted House and Other Stories* (collected by Leonard Woolf, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944), p. 82. See also Bill Brown, 'The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)', *Modernism/modernity*, 6:2, April 1999, pp. 1-28.

¹³⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Presence of Objects...' (p. 31).

THE POETICS OF WALKING THROUGH THE CITY

Michel de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life* and in particular his short chapter entitled *Walking through the City* have initiated a wealth of subsequent debates concerning the relevance of space as a 'practiced place'¹³⁸.

Certeau attempted to portray city streets as manifest with a 'forest of gestures' and to explore a 'mythic experience of space'¹³⁹. He also identified the hauntology of the cityscape by stating that, 'Haunted places are the only ones people can live in...'¹⁴⁰

Pedestrians, as they walk around the city read various locations in different ways. *Blokadniki* may pass a certain spot on a city street where a corpse once lay uncollected during the winter of 1941-42. This was a daily experience for Svetlana Gachina as she left her home in the morning en route to the music conservatory. For other passersby the same location today might be unremarkable but for Gachina this spot alerts her to another spatiality, a spatiality which reminds her that 'the past is not past'¹⁴¹.

¹³⁸ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking through the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 91-110, p. 117. For further discussions of Certeau refer also to Philippe Carrard, 'History as a Kind of Writing: Michel de Certeau and the Poetics of Historiography', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100. 2 (Spring 2001) 465-82.

¹³⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 102 and 93.

¹⁴⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 108.

¹⁴¹ Jen-yi Hsu writes that, 'They are remains from the past that persist into the present to call our attention to the fact that the past is not past'. Jen-yi Hsu, 'Ghosts in the City...' (p. 562).

As Certeau states, 'The dead haunt the living'¹⁴². Yet, in *Walking in the City* he also asserts that spirits can either be invoked or not¹⁴³. But this may not always be a matter of choice. Encountering a place once synonymous with death might result in the past *re-biting* the present¹⁴⁴. Acts of forgetting may be 'directed against the past' but unforeseen mnemonic traces can also insert something *extra* or *other* into the present¹⁴⁵. Hidden geographies therefore contain within them their own spectral logic. This *phantom effect* conjoins with *phantomogenic* words, objects and sounds which form the iconology of the siege¹⁴⁶.

Examining everyday activities during the siege highlights the fortitude, determination and bravery of Leningraders. Their daily routines were a reflection of a sense of duty and purpose. The fusion of the theatres of war and of civilian life elevated the everyday beyond the realms of mundane existence. Yet, while accepting the relevance of Certeau's work on this topic to this study it is also necessary to underline that theories of everyday life often focus on the casual, almost blasé aspects of daily routines. The collision of the extraordinary and everyday which occurred during the siege therefore demands a fresh theoretical approach.

¹⁴² Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (part of the series *Theory and History of Literature*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, vol. 17, 1986), p. 3.

¹⁴³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Refer also to Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The state of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, p. 176.

Derek Schilling notes that, '*The Practice of Everyday Life* is explicitly dedicated to "*chaqun*" (everyone or everyman), a character who appears as mute and marginal, outside of history, but also numerically superior'. Schilling equates Certeau's 'everyone' with humanist anti-heroes such as 'Nobody, Nemo, and Niemand...'¹⁴⁷

Yet, the blockade canonised ordinary Leningraders as *homines sacri*. Elena Vishnevskaiia's medals and her congratulatory postcard from President Putin are an example of how *blokadniki* feel that they have a place in history. She was too young to fight at the front but her sheer presence in besieged Leningrad led to subsequent awards and decorations. Through repeating innumerable daily acts Leningraders were using the practice of everyday life as a means of thwarting Fascism. Theories of everyday life like Schilling's therefore overlook the possibility that everyday life in certain circumstances can become extraordinary and that its practitioners can not only become part of history but even create history.

Claire Colebrook writes that 'Everyday life in its usual sense, with its acceptance of norms and ends, with its unreflected commitment to values that are taken as real, would be the very antithesis of true life, the bourgeois thinking of the herd'¹⁴⁸.

During the siege even the simplest task of attempting to make a basic meal

¹⁴⁷ Derek Schilling, 'Everyday Life and the Challenge to History in Postwar France: Braudel, Lefebvre, Certeau', *Diacritics*, 33. 1 (Spring 2003), 23-40 (pp. 35-36).

¹⁴⁸ Claire Colebrook, 'The Politics and Potential of Everyday Life: On the Very Concept of Everyday Life', *New Literary History*, 33. 4 (Autumn 2002), 687-706 (p. 694).

demanded ingenuity and considerable effort. Thus, maintenance of everyday life was a reassertion of true life rather than a denial of it.

Michel de Certeau, like Walter Benjamin and various other authors separates the walker from the crowd. 'The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below", below the thresholds at which visibility begins'. They are 'blind' to the spaces they make use of. As he views Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center there is an assumption that he 'apprehends' something which the teeming crowds far below cannot. This is because the everyday 'has a certain strangeness that does not surface...' Social practices conducted amidst the bustling city are 'characterized by their blindness'¹⁴⁹.

Yet, strangeness constantly surfaced during the 900 days and propagandist slogans broadcast through large street speakers were ever present reminders of the importance of maintaining daily routines. With the proximity of death and corpses in the streets sensory perception was heightened. Leningraders like Tat'iana Letenkova, far from becoming blind to their surroundings, were almost afraid to open their eyes for fear of apprehending some new and terrible vision.

Paul de Man wrote that 'To make the invisible visible is uncanny'¹⁵⁰. Everyday life, as portrayed as casual and mundane renders our mortality invisible. Yet, the uncanny topography of besieged Leningrad named what Certeau termed

¹⁴⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*...p. 91-93.

¹⁵⁰ Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986), p. 49.

the 'unnamable'. 'It remains that death is not named'¹⁵¹. This is because everyday time is normally casual time, 'scattered all along duration'¹⁵².

One of Certeau's most telling examples is that of the dying hospital patient who is almost considered a 'deviant' because he lives in an institution dedicated to the preservation of life¹⁵³. During the siege death itself became gradually acknowledged as part of everyday life. Consequently, that which is normally considered to be the very opposite of everyday life was treated by many with casual acceptance. Leningraders, unlike the teeming New Yorkers far beneath Certeau's lofty perch on the World Trade Center building were not blind to the spaces they made use of. They were also constantly confronted by unforeseen and often dangerous circumstances. Certeau writes that 'to eliminate the unforeseen ...is to interdict the possibility of a living and 'mythical' practice of the city'¹⁵⁴. The sudden wails of air raid sirens, falling incendiary bombs and the sight of people simply collapsing in the streets rendered the unforeseen commonplace. Leningraders, according to Certeau's premise could therefore hardly avoid entering into 'a living and "mythical" practice of the city'.

Blokadniki continue to marvel at the strange cruel beauty of war torn Leningrad.

Nicholas Royle writes that 'The uncanny is what comes out of the darkness'. The darkness itself becomes the 'site of ghostly omissions and emissions'¹⁵⁵. Tat'iana

¹⁵¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 197.

¹⁵² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 202-3.

¹⁵³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 190.

¹⁵⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 203.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003), p. 108-9.

Letenkova recalled that she hated the thought of day becoming night¹⁵⁶. The cliché of unreflective individuals conducting daily routines and journeys against the backdrop of the bustling city grinds to a halt in besieged Leningrad. Yet, everyday life did exist, albeit within a parallel reality.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the *flâneur* echoes in certain respects the experience of Leningraders as they mapped their way across the city. Kristin Veel writes that, 'For Benjamin the modern city is a place in which oppositions such as modern and archaic, sacred and profane, public and private, exterior and interior come together and demand another logic and legibility from the person who wants to navigate in this space. Navigation becomes a question of chance and sensory impulses rather than of reason and calculation...' ¹⁵⁷ Elena Vishnevskaja made her way across the *Volodarskii* bridge to school, Svetlana Gachina from *Ulitsa Griftsova* to the conservatory and the workers at the *Elektrosila* plant dodged German attacks on their route to the factory. All of them relied on intuition as a crucial means of survival.

Nevertheless, they were not the *flâneur* described by Walter Benjamin. This concept is dogged by associations with the *voyeur* and again by images of the casual stroller or urban Rambler making his way across the city. Tat'iana Letenkova did not casually stroll across the 'uneven' ice of the Neva. Nevertheless, she was a witness to the city's transformed topography. Heather Leland Roberts writes that

¹⁵⁶ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Kristin Veel, 'The Irreducibility of Space: Labyrinths, Cities, Cyberspace', *Diacritics*, 33, 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 2003), 151-72 (p. 159).

‘the intent behind traditional *flânerie* was strictly casual and desultory...’¹⁵⁸ The *flâneur* also has predominantly male connotations. Janice Mouton observes that in general the ‘*flâneuse* is rarely mentioned’¹⁵⁹. Even the female narrator in Virginia Woolf’s essay *Street Haunting* feels compelled to think up an excuse for her wanderings. The pretense being that she is on her way to buy a pencil¹⁶⁰. Loren Kruger reminds us that the term *voyeur* ‘implies sexual predation’ while the female equivalent of the *flâneur* is ‘the streetwalker or the prostitute’. These connotations clearly limit the applicability of the concept of the *flâneur* to wartime Leningraders. Especially when one takes into account the fact that Soviet women contributed to almost every aspect of the war effort¹⁶¹.

On the other hand Jen-yi Hsu notes that, ‘*Flânerie*, in terms of physical wandering and mnemonic loitering, is therefore capable of producing an uncanny, or *unheimlich* temporal-spatial dimension out of the present, familiar (*heimlich*) urban topography’¹⁶². This certainly comes closer to a definition of what it was like to walk through besieged Leningrad. The *flâneur* also makes a conscious choice to

¹⁵⁸ Heather Leland Roberts, “The Public Heart”: Urban Life and the Politics of Sympathy in Lydia Maria Child’s Letters from New York’, *American Literature*, 76. 4 (December 2004), 749-75 (p. 752).

¹⁵⁹ Janice Mouton, ‘From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse: Agnes Varda’s Cleo in the City’, *Cinema Journal*, 40:2, (Winter 2001), 3-16 (p. 7).

¹⁶⁰ Janice Mouton writes that, ‘since in 1927 a woman still needed an excuse for walking the streets alone. She could go for a stroll as long as she had a ready justification: ‘Really I must buy a pencil’. Same as above (p. 7). Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Haunting, A London Adventure’, in Andrew McNeillie, (editor), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 155.

¹⁶¹ A notable exception to this rule was the politburo itself which remained an exclusively male preserve.

¹⁶² Jen-yi Hsu, ‘Ghosts in the City...’ (p. 551).

give himself up to chance encounters and meanderings. He implicitly possesses the intellectual capability to separate himself from the crowd through apprehending his surroundings in new ways¹⁶³.

Nevertheless, Leningraders did not need to actively seek out the uncanny because the *unheimlich* could often appear threatening and unpredictable. Velezhova's terror of cannibals and Letenkova's fear of the darkness are testament to this. It is rather that the repetition of acts such as walking through the city became 'a politics of redemption' which interrogated Fascist assumptions that life in Leningrad could be brought to a halt¹⁶⁴.

Mary A. Favret has attempted to revise the concept of the *flâneur* to describe everyday practices in England during the period of the Napoleonic wars. She states that 'this generation discovered war in their everyday' and in turn, 'suffered through everyday war'. Their response to the 'warring world around them' presents 'sobering lessons to more recent theorists of the everyday...'¹⁶⁵ Favret notes that the existence of war within the everyday demands a fresh theoretical approach which cannot be satisfied by the urban spectatorship of the *flâneur* or *badaud* (gawker)¹⁶⁶. Walking through battle-scarred Leningrad was

¹⁶³ Katherine Gantz states that, 'Baudelaire's *flâneur* is understood as heroic for his ability to endure the crowd at close proximity, to withstand its rawness while never truly joining its ranks'. The *flâneur* is not consequently at one with the community as many Leningraders perceived themselves to be during the siege. He *endures* close encounters with the herd. Katherine Gantz, 'Strolling with Houellebecq: The Textual Terrain of Postmodern Flânerie', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28: 3 (Winter 2005), 149-61 (p. 156).

¹⁶⁴ Jen-yi Hsu, 'Ghosts in the City...' (p. 552).

¹⁶⁵ Mary A. Favret, 'Everyday War', *English Literary History*, 72. 3 (Autumn 2005), 605-33 (p. 608).

¹⁶⁶ See also Tom Gunning, 'From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and Traffic in Souls (1913)', *Wide Angle*, 19. 4 (October 1997), 25-61 (p. 26).

an action borne from a sense of personal urgency and moral duty¹⁶⁷. Joe Moran concurs that when the everyday is disrupted by extraordinary events it produces 'new forms of awareness' which transform 'unthinking routine'¹⁶⁸. Yet Nancy Ries observes that 'In cultural studies, the everyday is almost always juxtaposed against the extraordinary, as being the opposite of the 'esoteric or exotic worlds... the miraculous, the magical or the sacred'. She goes on to state that 'Surely the everyday is a refuge from history, even from time itself. And alongside power, history and time are those things that most violate the everyday'¹⁶⁹.

She does not therefore confront the possibility that history and the everyday can in certain circumstances become intertwined. The practice of everyday life in siege testimony is a cornerstone of these sacred narratives. Tat'iana Letenkova's recollection of the first day her mother made *duranda* was an expression of the 'magical or the sacred'. Her statement that she had wished at the time that she could eat *duranda*, and only *duranda* everyday for the rest of her life elevated this moment to an experience of sheer joy and relief¹⁷⁰.

John Frow's assertion that 'the everyday is that place where relations between a heterogeneous array of knowledges and reasons are worked out' is much more applicable to the kind of versatility demonstrated by Leningraders¹⁷¹. Yet, in terms

¹⁶⁷ See also Heather Leland Roberts, "The Public Heart..." (p. 752).

¹⁶⁸ Joe Moran, 'November in Berlin: the End of the Everyday', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 57, (Spring 2004), 216-34 (pp. 216-17).

¹⁶⁹ Nancy Ries, 'Anthropology and the Everyday, from Comfort to Terror', *New Literary History*, 33: 4 (Autumn 2002), 725-42 (pp. 733-34).

¹⁷⁰ See also p. 17.

¹⁷¹ John Frow, "Never Draw to an Inside Straight": On Everyday Knowledge', *New Literary History*, 33: 4 (Autumn 2002), 623-37 (p. 637).

of everyday life during the 900 days this statement does not go far enough. Marc Augé maintains that 'one cannot find social activities that are strictly speaking outside the sacred, nor sacred activities that have no social applications or implications'¹⁷². Everyday life does not necessarily exclude the sacred, nor is it solely a refuge from history. In this regard, theoretical discussions of everyday life must be broadened to include situations where war and the everyday collide.

The maintenance of everyday life during the siege was in itself both 'redemptive and disruptive'¹⁷³. It was redemptive as it brought with it the potential for survival. For the enemy it was disruptive because it continued to postpone what was regarded as Leningrad's inevitable surrender. As a reflection of a spirit of defiance, the continuation of daily routine, became therefore a vital component in the defence of Leningrad.

THE CITY AS A LABYRINTH OF SIGNS

Peter Ackroyd described the city as 'a labyrinth of signs'¹⁷⁴. He goes on to state that 'the Londoner speaks to the entire city with words and signs that are as old as the city itself'¹⁷⁵. D. Vance Smith cites the example of a sign installed in St. Paul's cathedral 'sometime before 1366' which marked among other things, the foundation

¹⁷² Marc Augé, *The Anthropological Circle: Symbol, Function, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), p. 31.

¹⁷³ Claire Colebrook, 'The Politics and Potential of Everyday Life...' (p. 699).

¹⁷⁴⁻⁷⁵ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*, pp. 188 and 193.

of the city by Brutus, the conversion of the English by St. Augustine and the death of King Arthur. This sign mingled 'mythical events and real events, secular history and sacred history' and 'transformed the Imaginary of London's history into a powerful index of London's symbolic identity'. Not only that, but Smith regards this sign as bringing us to the heart of historiography as establishing the 'ownership of real and imagined territories'¹⁷⁶.

Brian Reynolds describes the earliest maps as history books which depict not only a route of passage but a 'log' of personal experience. With the gradual disappearance of pictorial representations cartography engaged in a process of forgetting whereby 'visible evidence of its own construction' ceased to exist¹⁷⁷.

Human interpretation of the city's 'labyrinth of signs' cannot be satisfactorily portrayed by maps which merely mirror the landscape. As Mario Vrbanic states postmodern culture 'calls the map with its geometrized lines into question'¹⁷⁸.

The perfect map, would be *phantasmic*, containing within it both territories and dreams 'of divine knowledge'¹⁷⁹. It would be rhizomic, embracing 'continuously fluid combinations of images, in order to subvert "normal" notions of representation, symbol, and text'¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁶ D. Vance Smith, 'Irregular Histories: Forgetting Ourselves', p. 162.

¹⁷⁷ Bryan Reynolds, 'The Transversality of Michel de Certeau...' (p. 68).

¹⁷⁸⁻⁷⁹ Mario Vrbanic, 'Burroughs's Phantasmic Maps', *New Literary History*, 36. 2 (Spring 2005), 313-26 (p. 313).

¹⁸⁰ Mario Vrbanic, 'Burroughs's Phantasmic Maps' (p. 325).

The practice of walking is ‘opposed to the forgetting principle of cartography’ because the pedestrian has the ability to remember ‘many things that have been forgotten’¹⁸¹. Walking through the city bears the potential of the discovery of both ‘relics and legends’¹⁸². Pedestrians walking along *Nevskii Prospekt*, London’s Oxford Street, or Rome’s *Via Condotti* may not be aware of the ‘original referents of these proper names’ but ‘their ability to signify outlives [their] first definition’¹⁸³.

Certeau identifies that ‘strange toponymy that is detached from actual places and flies over the city like a geography of “meanings” held in suspension...’¹⁸⁴

The urban systematicity of the metropolis and the geometrical lines of cartography are eluded by ‘symbolic mechanisms’ such as represented by legends, memories and dreams¹⁸⁵. As Verena Andermatt Conley succinctly states, ‘What the map cuts up, the story cuts across’¹⁸⁶. Historiography therefore bears the potential of combining both real and imagined territories.

In the case of *blokadniki* these imagined landscapes represent a particularly poignant combination of both textuality and territory. The sign installed in the

¹⁸¹ Bryan Reynolds, ‘The Transversality of Michel de Certeau...’ (p. 74).

¹⁸² Bryan Reynolds, ‘The Transversality of Michel de Certeau...’, (pp. 74-5). Reynolds is also citing Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*...pp. 106-7.

¹⁸³ Bryan Reynolds, ‘The Transversality of Michel de Certeau...’ (pp. 74-5). See also Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*...p. 104.

¹⁸⁴⁻⁸⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*...pp. 104-05.

¹⁸⁶ Verena Andermatt Conley, ‘Processual Practices’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:2 (Spring 2001), 483-500 (p. 491).

medieval St. Paul's becomes for them the blue and white signs warning: 'Citizens: In the case of shelling this side of the street is most dangerous'¹⁸⁷. A sign which once reminded Leningraders of imminent danger, subsequently comes to signify the entire siege. A sacred relic of siege iconography, it invokes a 'deeply rooted vision' which is both 'significative and meaningful'¹⁸⁸.

Signs and symbols also form part of what Henri Lefebvre identifies as *representational spaces*. These spaces are '*lived* through' and are associated with 'images and symbols' which 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate'¹⁸⁹. Representational space also makes 'symbolic use of its objects'¹⁹⁰. Consequently, ideologies designate a certain place or object with sacred status¹⁹¹.

MALYI RADIUS

A significant strand of contemporary siege narrative focuses upon what Daniil Granin and Ales' Adamovich term the *malyi radius*¹⁹². The *malyi radius*, or small radius, encompasses the local environs of Leningraders. It charts their daily journeys from their homes towards various destination points across the city. As

¹⁸⁷ In Russian it reads, '*Grazhdane: Pri Artobstrele Eto Storona Ulitsy Naibolee Opasno*'.

¹⁸⁸ Joel Bonnemaïson, *Culture and Space: Conceiving a New Cultural Geography* (I.B Tauris: London and New York, 2005), pp. 43 and 81.

¹⁸⁹⁻⁹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), pp. 38-9.

¹⁹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 210.

¹⁹² Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 270.

the winter of 1941-42 progressed these excursions became increasingly hazardous and even a relatively brief walk to the bread queue became tantamount to a treacherous expedition. Countless stories and reminiscences emanate from the realm of the *malyi radius*, echoing Conley's statement that 'What the map cuts up, the story cuts across'¹⁹³.

Georgii Alekseevich Kniazev's *malyi radius* covered the 800 metres along the *Naberezhnaia Neva* (Neva embankment) which separated his home from his place of work at the Academy of Sciences. For the whole blockade 'this small section of the city was all that he could see and within this tiny radius his entire war unfolded – the siege, shelling, bombs, hunger and evacuation'¹⁹⁴.

Andrei Vasilievskii described his *malyi radius* as encompassing his local post office, a small market nearby, and most importantly the bread shop (*bulochnaia*)¹⁹⁵. Similarly, Tat'iana Letenkova's narrative also places the bread shop as a key location. Vasilievskii recalled this place as densely populated by the 'walking-dystrophic' whose suffering was 'printed on their faces'. Vasilievskii, like Letenkova also walked regularly to the Neva to collect water through holes in the ice¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹³ Verena Andermatt Conley, 'Processual Practices', (p. 491).

¹⁹⁴ *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 246.

¹⁹⁵ Anna Vasilievskaiia, '*Kniga o Zhizni*'.

¹⁹⁶ Anna Vasilievskaiia, '*Kniga o Zhizni*'.

Liudmila Anapova recalled that the Neva was only 500 metres away from her home, yet this seemed at the time to be a vast distance. 'We lowered sledges, saucepans and milk churns from the fourth floor. We made our way slowly to the Neva, across the snowdrifts, and scooped up freezing water from the ice holes. On both sides lay the abandoned corpses of the dead. Some were clothed, others were covered in shrouds'¹⁹⁷.

Eleonora Fedoseeva lived in a dormitory at the cellulose-paper factory on *Kamennyi Ostrov* (island). She describes it as unrecognisable today with its luxury flats built for the elite. She remembers that the journey to the bread shop was one filled with dread. Corpses lay on the street while others who had perished were dragged to the cemeteries on sledges. Once, she arrived at the bread shop only to be confronted by a body in the snow which had been beheaded by cannibals¹⁹⁸. In each case, locations which promised the gift of life, whether in the form of bread or water, constantly brought with them reminders of death.

Iraida Starikova recalled catching the tram to the outskirts of the city during the early weeks of the siege in order to scavenge for cabbage hearts (*kocheryzhki*) in the fields around the Kirov factory. The topic of *kocheryzhki* was mentioned a number of times by at least half of the respondents who were interviewed. This source of sustenance soon ran out and Starikova remembered that the trams stopped

¹⁹⁷ Liudmila Anapova, 'Siege Of Leningrad Survivor Relives Her Childhood Terror', *The St. Petersburg Press*, no.91, 31 January to 6 February 1995 <www.sptimes.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

¹⁹⁸ Maria Okuneva, '*Strashno, kak my zhili, shto eli*', *Zhizn*', Vypusk: 104 (1868), 14 April 2005 <YTRO.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

altogether on 21 November 1941. She also recalled a manhole in the square beside her home where water remained unfrozen. People formed long, yet orderly queues and waited patiently with their ‘cans, teapots and mugs’¹⁹⁹. If for some reason someone failed swiftly to scoop up enough water they still stood aside in order to make sure that the queue kept on moving. This sense of improvised decorum is a recurrent theme²⁰⁰. It also echoes Natalia Velezhova’s statement that people had a strong conscience and that they ‘were very disciplined’²⁰¹.

Journeys across the *malyi radius* were meticulously navigated and mapped. Lev Uspenskii recalled both the pain and solitude of walking and of ‘going, going, going’ as the freezing water from the bucket he carried from the Neva splashed down his legs and across his boots²⁰². Aleksandra Arkhipova remembered her trips to the *bania* or baths. She emphasised her sense of gratitude that she lived nearby. She also described washing in the *bania* as a great luxury²⁰³.

The Kolpino veteran Lidiia Smirnova recalled that early on during the siege she and her family were moved out of their home into a *zemlianka* or improvised earth dwelling. Ensconced in the *zemlianka* she shared a sense of confinement which many soldiers experienced in similar underground lairs dotted along the front lines²⁰⁴. Anatolii Muzhikov greeted New Year 1942 while on guard duty beside his *zemlianka*. The sky was illuminated by the moon and by distant stars, and a

¹⁹⁹ Iraida Vasilievna Starikova, ‘*Kofe’ iz Sladkou Zemli...*’

²⁰⁰ See also Grigorii Tverskou’s story about the bread truck, p. 297.

²⁰¹ See above, p. 301.

²⁰² Lev Vasil’evich Uspenskii, ‘*Zapiski Starogo Peterburzhitsa...*’

²⁰³ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 8.

²⁰⁴ BL10/JC/09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 6.

deep silence was only occasionally interrupted by rifle fire. In his mind, life at home and at the front intermingled. Between himself and the city centre lay a long walk of around sixty kilometres along the banks of the Neva. It was a route undertaken by many soldiers who made impromptu excursions to deliver food parcels to their families²⁰⁵.

Leningraders focussed on their immediate surroundings. Their horizons were limited to simple objectives of reaching key locations, whether they be their place of work, the *bania* or in the case of Elena Vishnevskaja her local school. For Vishnevskaja, Letenkova and Arkhipova bridges were a common theme. All three of them either experienced narrow escapes from shelling or witnessed the after effects of raids while crossing the Neva. For them, bridges were places of imminent danger.

Ol'ga Rozanova almost depicted life in the centre of town and life on the outskirts as entirely separate worlds. The outskirts were places blighted by cannibalism and crime but such activities she asserted, 'Could not have taken place in the centre of the city'²⁰⁶. Finally, Natalia Velezhova, Viktor Lodkin and Aleksandr Cherapukhin were interviewed in a veterans' club close to the Vitebsk freight yards. The proximity of the site of the Badaev warehouses was constantly stressed. Cherapukhin looked out of the windows at the same sky as he described the vast pillars of smoke which filled the air after the bombing²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁵ Harrison Salisbury stated that, 'these soldiers not infrequently fell victim to attacks by the cannibals'. This was because their excursions usually took place late at night when they were more vulnerable. Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 478.

²⁰⁶ See above, p. 295.

²⁰⁷ BL8/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

Whether in Kolpino, the *Elektrosila* plant or in the centre, each respondent stressed the importance of their *malyi radius*. Each narrative connected the myths of everyday life with local buildings, monuments and streets. It was not so much a 'living and "mythical" practice of the city' as a whole, but a living and mythical practice of various individual districts. The veterans of the *Elektrosila* plant also stressed that this sense of confinement was underlined by various checkpoints located across the city.

Verena Andermatt Conley reminds us that the Greek word for narrative is *diegesis*. She writes that 'it establishes an itinerary (it "guides") and it passes through (it "transgresses")'²⁰⁸. Consequently, narrative is itself a form of navigation. It negotiates between geometric space which is 'defined by grids and networks' and anthropological space 'that of poetry, legends, and memory'. For Leningraders the city became a highly 'gridded or controlled space'²⁰⁹. Establishing ways of moving about within this space became a primary objective. Their narratives are an expression of confinement but as Richard Terdiman reminds us 'meaning is the consequence of a limit; meaning is an effect of margins. We perceive and conceive and construct and learn on this frontier'²¹⁰.

²⁰⁸⁻⁰⁹ Verena Andermatt Conley, 'Processual Practices', p. 490 and p. 486.

²¹⁰ Richard Terdiman, 'The Marginality of Michel de Certeau', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100:2 (Spring 2001), 399-421 (p. 399).

CONCLUSION

'No longer did you smell gasoline, tobacco, horses, dogs or cats. The healthy smell of people had vanished. Now the city smelled of raw snow and wet stone'.

Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*²¹¹

Cats, dogs, birds and horses disappeared, and all public transport ground to a halt.

The smell of 'raw snow and wet stone' described by Salisbury intermingled with the odour of turpentine which emanated from trucks carrying the dead. Amidst the pristine snow and searing temperatures raging fires consumed building after building. A labyrinth of new signs replaced the old as Leningraders attempted to re-orientate themselves in de-familiarised terrain.

Michel de Certeau asserts that 'to eliminate the unforeseen ...is to interdict the possibility of a living and 'mythical' practice of the city'²¹². Walking through besieged Leningrad was an activity which invited the unforeseen. Each journey had a purpose, and the concept of urban rambling or loitering which is so redolent of the *flâneur* seems inappropriate within this context. Leningraders became observers and witnesses whose sensory perception was intensified by the transformed topography of their city. In addition, a wide range of objects and images became synonymous with their quest for survival.

The hauntology of the city contains its own spectral logic. Traces of the siege still visible upon buildings and battlefields *re-bite* the present along with

²¹¹ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*p. 438.

²¹² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 203.

phantomogenic words, objects and sounds. The everydayness of death made the invisible visible and named the unnamable. With it came a parallel sense of logic which only *blokadniki* can truly appreciate.

This is perfectly illustrated by a short story recalled by L. El'iashova which is entitled: '*Moi neliubimyi Most*' (*My least favourite bridge*)²¹³. El'iashova remembers her grandmother asserting that she had a particular dislike for the *Tuchkov Most*. On one occasion they were making their way towards the *Sportivnaia* station but the *Tuchkov* stood between them and their destination. The grandmother was extremely reluctant to cross the bridge saying that, 'I really do not care for it'.

El'iashova tried to reassure her by stating that it was a beautiful bridge with a clear view of the famous *Rostral'naye Colonnny* (column). The grandmother countered that in January 1942 there had been no such view. She had crossed the *Tuchkov* on her way back and forward to work, but always in the darkness of early morning or in the late afternoon. She could see only the columns of pathetic figures dragging the dead on sledges towards the *Smolenskoe Kladbishche* (cemetery).

The grandmother was reluctant to cross because of one enduring memory. One night on the way back from work a woman had sidled up to her and whispered

²¹³ L. El'iashova, '*My ukhodim...my ostaemsia*', *Neva*, no.1, 2004, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 8/11/2005].

that the hand of a certain 'corpse' was moving. They alerted the attention of the woman pulling the sled who gave the following response. 'Yes, he is still moving a bit. But when I get there (to the cemetery) he will probably have stopped. You see, tomorrow, I may no longer have the strength to bury him'.

The image is profane, that of a man still alive being taken for burial. It invokes one of our worst nightmares, that of being buried alive. Yet, in this case it is done out of kindness. The lady, possibly his wife, knows that tomorrow may be too late, both for himself and for her. It was his last chance of a decent burial and his death appeared to be inevitable. Yet this encounter still haunted El'iashova's grandmother who stated defiantly that 'I may have put on weight since then but as far as that bridge is concerned I try to avoid it at all costs'.

Lidiia Usova's reluctance to fix her blemished parquet floor and Apollon Davidson's refusal to watch the end of the film '*Anton Ivanovich Serdit'sia*' are similar superstitions which are borne out of a respect for the hauntology of the past. Walking through the city remains an activity which invites the unforeseen. *Blokadniki* living in St. Petersburg today are well aware of the existence of hidden geographies. Every street corner, monument or bridge can trigger vivid memories, memories which are a constant reminder that 'the past is not past'²¹⁴.

²¹⁴ Jen-yi Hsu, 'Ghosts in the City...', p. 562.

RED ECLIPSE: THE MYTH OF THE BADAEV WAREHOUSES

The American poet H.D, after surviving her first air raid during the London Blitz wrote that, 'we are alive within the walls of our bodies, for the time being...'¹ After the first night of bombing on 8 September 1941 Leningraders may well have identified with this sentiment. As stated in the earlier chapter examining published siege testimonies, H.D portrayed this experience as similar to a spiritual resurrection which turned 'myth into reality'. In the case of the bombing of the Badaev warehouses, the opposite is true. Leningraders turned reality into myth as they sought to interpret the significance of this event.

David Panagia, in his critique of Agamben's book: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* states that the *homo sacer* has 'an understanding of thinking that coincides with the material register of the body as the bearer of life and death'. Through surviving her first air raid H.D had comprehended the fragility of the human body. Panagia states that this realisation is an essential part in the process of becoming a *homo sacer*².

The story of the Badaev warehouses brings together several different agencies which fuelled later myth production. It was above all, an assault upon the senses.

¹ H.D., *Within the Walls* (Iowa City: The Windhover Press, 1993), p. 2.

² Davide Panagia, 'The Sacredness of Life and Death: Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and the Tasks of Political Thinking'.

Plumes of smoke billowed upwards into the skies, fires raged on untamed for several days and the smell of burnt sugar filled the air. As the quotations cited below demonstrate this event was also interpreted in the light of later events, most notably in association with the subsequent famine.

Panagia states that the key questions lying behind Agamben's theory of the sacred are essentially: 'Why is life sacred? How is sacredness sustained? What is the relationship between the sacredness of life and the proliferation of death?' The sacredness of life in H.D's case emerges from the realisation that she had survived a dangerous experience. As Leningraders assessed the aftermath of the bombing many realised that they had passed through a similar test.

Svetlana Gachina related that for her the siege began on the early hours of the morning of 9 September 1941³. To a certain extent the Badaev bombing had become for her a marker, which defined the boundary between siege life and life in peacetime. It served both as an *exemplum* for the entire suffering endured during the blockade and as a direct explanation for that suffering.

Tat'iana Letenkova began her testimony with the words, 'Well, first, of course, there was the bombing of the Badaev warehouses'⁴. She was taking the import of this statement for granted. She also linked the bombing with all her later

³ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 1.

⁴ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 1.

experiences. The Badaev fire thus becomes ‘the threshold of the present’ which registers the presence of death amidst life⁵. It subsequently triggers a collective tendency towards mythopoetic production and becomes in turn the first myth of the siege. In the case of Letenkova and other respondents such as Ol’ga Rozanova and Aleksandra Arkhipova it is also a key structural device used to give their opening statements a precise historical context and initial reference point. Yet, as demonstrated below mythopoetic tendencies are evident from the outset. During the interviews the Badaev story was never presented simply as a historical event but as that initial experience of danger which brought proliferation of death and at the same time emphasised the sacredness of life.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

W. Bruce Lincoln states that the Badaev warehouses were located at the Vitebsk freight yards in the centre of the city. The fires, which began on 8 September 1941 continued unabated for several days and three thousand tons of flour and two thousand five hundred tons of sugar were lost.

Lincoln emphasises the psychological impact that the smell of burning meat, sugar and flour in the air had on the populace. ‘Almost everyone thought that the Badaev

⁵ Gabriele Rosenthal, Petra Jordans and Bettina Voelter, ‘Surviving together and living apart in Israel and West Germany: the Genzor Family’, in *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime*, p. 33.

losses had brought the city to the brink of disaster'. *Babushki* interpreted this event as a portent of famine and the 'story spread that the city had lost enough food to last for several years. That was not true, but the belief persisted long after the war had ended'. In reality, only two and a half days worth of rations had been destroyed. Consequently, as Lincoln confirms, 'these were minor losses'⁶.

Lincoln's synopsis is accurate apart from one omission. The interviews conducted for this project indicate that these rumours may be as prevalent today as they were in 1941. Therefore, the myth of the Badaev warehouses did not just 'persist long after the war ended' but continues to thrive. The resilience of this myth was acknowledged in a recent article by Anatolii Veselov entitled, 'The fight against hunger in besieged Leningrad'. He writes that, 'A lack of concrete information about the actual situation concerning the level of food supplies led to the creation of siege myths which continue to live on today. One of these myths originated from the rumour that the fire at the Badaev warehouses was the main reason for the famine'. Yet, he states that the Badaev warehouses only contained up to eight days worth of supplies⁷.

Lincoln and Veselov note the divergence between facts surrounding the bombing and the manner in which the significance of this event is interpreted. John K. Riches has written that myths 'are there not simply to impose a particular view of the world and a particular social order on a particular people, but rather to attempt to alleviate

⁶ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight: St. Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia*, p. 279.

⁷ A. P. Veselov, 'Bor'ba s Golodom v Blokadnom Leningrade', *Otechestvennaia Istorii* no. 3, 2002, published at <vivovoco.nns.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

the deep-set problems and tensions within a given society. It is a therapeutic, rather than an ideological, hegemonic view of myth'⁸. Veselov's observation that the populace began these stories as a response to a general lack of information regarding the extent of food supplies concords with Riches' theory. The myth of the Badaev warehouses was later circulated amongst the populace as a means of explaining the famine. Without access to more detailed information Leningraders were forced to come to their own conclusions about the reason for the food shortages.

Riches' model also suggests the possibility that myth can resolve potential conflicts in a given society. The belief that the bombing of the Badaev warehouses was the sole reason for the ensuing famine enabled Leningraders to avoid uncomfortable questions about the kind of preparation conducted by the Soviet authorities in the lead up to war.

Blokadnik, Apollon Davidson recalled how the story concerning the Badaev warehouses began to circulate. 'There was this rumour...that the hunger was a result of the Germans bombing the Badaev warehouses. I listened to this group of people chatting...they stated that surely there must be more than one warehouse for three to four million people. I also recall Mikoyan's memoirs where he maintained that he attempted to persuade Stalin to divert supplies in the direction of Leningrad...this was a huge deceit. In fact, up until the last days of peace we were supplying Germany with food...Then, a directive was received from Stalin stating that no

⁸ John K. Riches, 'Conflicting Mythologies: Mythical Narrative in the Gospel of Mark' (p. 35). See also, 'In Defence of Myth: The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative', p. 173.

supplies were to be sent to Leningrad. Mikoyan also refused to approve Marshal Kulik's request for extra divisions to be sent to the Leningrad front'⁹.

Davidson's appraisal of the reasons behind the famine lays the blame squarely at the door of the Soviet authorities. In this respect it could be interpreted as an effort to de-mythologise the Badaev myth. Yet even the former prominent Communist official Grigorii Romanov appears to cite the bombing as a key reason for the later food crisis. He, like Davidson dismisses Mikoyan's claims by stating that, 'I really do not think this was possible. Everything was already too critical. The leadership of the country including Zhdanov did everything they could to save Leningrad. In Leningrad at that time there was heavy bombing and warehouses with bread in them were on fire. I remember how that vast warehouse burned...' ¹⁰

Romanov concludes that while the leadership did everything they could to avert the crisis, their efforts were rendered irrelevant as soon as the warehouses had been bombed. If we are to believe Veselov and Lincoln's assertions that they contained only enough supplies for a very limited period then it is evident that Romanov is exaggerating the long-term impact of the fire.

It is also clear that his conclusions are based upon sensory memory. Romanov, like so many others witnessed 'how that vast warehouse burned'. While this

⁹ Vladimir Tol'ts, '*Tsena Pobedy*'.

¹⁰ Elena Iakovleva, '*Ia Protiv Nedostovernykh Versii*'.

statement can be assumed to be factual it is also merged with the rhetoric of mythologisation. The sensory impact of this vision was so intense that it was assumed that it bore some proto-apocalyptic message. Harrison Salisbury acknowledges this tendency by referring to the fire as a 'red eclipse'¹¹.

Nevertheless, the extent of its sensory impact was actually contradicted by the true long-term significance of the bombing. Consequently, intense sensory experience created a collective trauma, a trauma which had to be explained. Yet sensory memory continues to divert survivors away from the facts. It is also clear that the Badaev fire can no longer be remembered in and of itself as it will always be recalled in reference to the later food crisis. Thus it is difficult to disentangle the Badaev story from its subsequent incarnation as an *exemplum* for Leningraders' suffering.

Harrison Salisbury states that the city administration were aware at the time of how the significance of the bombing might be interpreted. They feared that rumours might circulate that the authorities had been caught off guard by the suddenness of the raid¹². As stated earlier Nikolai Lomagin provides us with a detailed account of Leningraders' grievances¹³.

¹¹ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, p. 289.

¹² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 290-91.

¹³ Refer to Nikita Lomagin, *Neizvestnaia Blokada*, pp. 287 and 361.

The Badaev warehouses were clearly unsuitable as a location for the storage of vital provisions. Salisbury describes them as ‘wooden buildings, put up one next to the other with gaps of not more than 25 or 30 feet between them’¹⁴.

Nevertheless, despite the fears of the wartime city Soviet none of the respondents who were interviewed blamed the government for the bombing. Aleksandra Arkhipova, Aleksandr Cherapukhin, Viktor Lodkin and Natalia Velezhova were all convinced that the accuracy of German bombing could only have been a consequence of covertly acquired intelligence. Cherapukhin was certain that the location of a local hospital had been revealed by saboteurs¹⁵. Svetlana Gachina felt that Leningrad’s proximity to the border made it vulnerable to foreign influence¹⁶.

Published testimonies demonstrate that these sentiments are shared by other survivors. Andrei Vasilievskii recalled that at the same time as the bombing rumours abounded of saboteurs helping the enemy. He witnessed a neighbour who spotted a partially blacked out window. From within shone the light of a lamp. The woman became immediately convinced that the occupier was sending a secret signal to German pilots circling above¹⁷. Roman Volotov made a direct link between the destruction of the warehouses and the existence of ‘a highly

¹⁴ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 289.

¹⁵ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 26.

¹⁶ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 22.

¹⁷ Anna Vasilievskaja, *Kniga o Zhizni*.

active fifth column working for Hitler'¹⁸. Again, the Soviet authorities were remarkably adept at deflecting any possible accusations through disseminating rumours about spies.

All these statements appear to point to a successful interpellation of the Soviet authorities' wartime call for vigilance. The Stalinist predilection for creating myths of foreign spies, saboteurs and 'wreckers' in industry is well known. Continued assertions by *blokadniki* about the prevalence of foreign spies within the city appear to confirm that the Soviet instrumentalisation of political myths is remarkably resilient. Nevertheless, the veterans in Kolpino recalled hearing German propaganda being broadcast from nearby loud speakers and also witnessed pamphlets being distributed by enemy aircraft which called upon Leningraders to surrender¹⁹. Consequently, the dissemination of any stories which heightened vigilance was arguably a vital tool in combating enemy efforts to undermine morale.

BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY: SURVIVORS ACCOUNTS OF THE BADAEV BOMBING

The views of the *blokadniki* interviewed for this project concerning the significance of the Badaev bombing were far from unanimous. Almost half of the respondents

¹⁸ Roman Aleksandrovich Volotov, '*Leningradskii Front*', Bair Irincheev, editor (date not provided), <www.iremember.ru> [accessed 11/06/2005].

¹⁹ BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 13.

referred to the bombing during the opening passages of their testimonies. In these instances they clearly regarded this event as the primary cause of the ensuing famine.

Aleksandr Cherapukhin, on the other hand, while underlining the sensory impact of the fire was adamant that it was not the sole cause of the food shortages. He stated that, ‘Yes, there was a lot of supplies there such as sugar, flour and so on. It certainly was one of the reasons for the famine but when you think of all the other factories the Germans bombed it could not have been the main reason. But the fire, you cannot imagine the heat from the fire and burning sugar. It was intense, water was useless against such a fire’²⁰. Interestingly, unlike Grigorii Romanov he is not permitting the intensity of his sensory recollections to cloud his overall opinion of the significance of this event.

Viktor Lodkin provided a similar account. ‘Well, I was just a boy but I remember the sweet earth, the fire and especially the smoke. But as a boy I could not understand the significance of this event. But I really do not think this was the main reason for the famine at all’²¹. Natalia Velezhova concurred stating that, ‘No, it was not the main cause – of course supplies were stored there but no it was not the main reason’²². The veterans at the *Elektrosila* plant agreed with this assertion while the group in Kolpino stated that the Badaev bombing was less significant for them than the shelling taking place all around them²³.

²⁰ BL8/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

²¹⁻²² BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 6 and BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, p. 22.

²³ This was underlined by Anna Sorokina who quickly passed over the topic of the bombing to discuss shelling in Kolpino. BL10/JC/ 09/06/KV, side A, transcript, p. 17.

Nevertheless, these statements were contrasted by other interpretations of the significance of this event. Ol'ga Rozanova provided the following account:

'I would like to say that we suffered tremendously during the siege because already, right at the beginning, the Badaev warehouses had gone up in flames. In these warehouses there was flour, grain and sugar. That is, all the provisions. This was all bombed and the fire raged for several days. People went there to dig up the earth because it was sweet. They then later siphoned out the sweet liquid from the earth because it was fit for drinking. They did this because the ration was 125 grams of bread...'²⁴

In fact, the ration for dependents was not cut to 125 grams until the second half of November. Harrison Salisbury also informs us that white bread was sold as late as September 10²⁵. Leningraders collected the sweet earth around the warehouses in anticipation of, rather than in response to chronic food shortages. Nevertheless, Rozanova makes a direct causal link between the bombing and the subsequent famine. Her assertion that they had suffered 'because already, right at the beginning, the Badaev warehouses had gone up in flames' echoes Romanov's statement that the situation was 'already too critical' for a crisis to be averted.

Rozanova's statement also demonstrates key characteristics which 'constitute the activity of the mythic mind'²⁶. She is telling a story about a real historical event but she is narrating her experience 'in terms of an archetype or paradigm'²⁷.

²⁴ BL2/JC/06/03/OR, side A, transcript, p. 4.

²⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, p. 292.

²⁶ N. Wyatt, 'The Mythic Mind', 3-61(p. 50).

²⁷ N. Wyatt, 'The Mythic Mind', (p. 50).

While recalling the event she utilises a 'symbolic short-cut' which connects the fire itself with the entire suffering of the blockade. This is not a reflection of a desire to distort the facts but a fusion of the sacred and the real. The Badaev bombing shaped experience and from that moment onwards Leningraders' everyday lives were irrevocably altered. It is perceived as the main reason for the famine not because of the actual amount of food stored on its premises but because the fire brought with it that first 'very real experience of life, death and the zone of indistinction wherein this experience lies'.

Rozanova's recollection of scorched sweet earth is also highly significant. This was one of the first occasions when Leningraders acted instinctively. Not only that but these narratives demonstrate that they did so in large numbers. Thus, the collective action of digging up the sweet earth was one of the first signs that the community was acting in tandem. Consequently, it became one of the initial motivators for the creation of a myth of a unified wartime community.

Aleksandra Arkhipova provided a similar account to that of Rozanova's. She recalled that 'It was said that we began to go hungry because of the Badaevskii... they were warehouses which contained provisions. They were bombed during the first days. Others tried to maintain that there was nothing special stored in the warehouses...but I remember going there with a bucket and collecting the earth

which had sugar in it...I carried this over the entire ten kilometers home...We then siphoned the liquid through a cloth and made sweet tea from it'²⁸.

The first pertinent question arising from this statement refers to her initial assertion that 'It was said we began to go hungry because of the Badaevskii'. She does not refer to anyone in particular but merely states that 'It was said...' Consequently, the impression is gained of a rumour spread from word to mouth amongst the populace. Arkhipova also makes a direct link between the later food crisis and the initial bombing. 'Others' may have asserted that the warehouses did not contain crucial provisions but she cites her own experience as proof to the contrary. She feels that as she herself dug up the sweet earth this was proof that the warehouses contained special provisions. Consequently, sensory experience becomes the basis for her later interpretation of the symbolism of the bombing.

Although claims that the bombing was the sole cause of the ensuing famine could be dismissed as not factually based they nevertheless form part of a narrative which combines 'reception, representation and contestation'²⁹. The point of reception occurred during the initial event which was subsequently represented as a point of contestation. The origin of the dispute comes from a widespread opinion that the authorities sought to underplay the magnitude of this event. In this regard the recitation of this narrative is a manifestation of 'democratic history' which takes into account the views of individuals as opposed to officially designated

²⁸ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 7.

²⁹ Alon Colfino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *American Historical Association*, 102:5 (December 1997), 1386-1403 (p. 1399).

master-narratives. It also demonstrates the therapeutic dimension of myth creation. The significance of the bombing needed to be explained. Even if official reports were not forthcoming Leningraders would make their own conclusions.

While points of contestation about the re-presentation of this event arose during the interviews all the respondents were in no doubt about the sensory impact which the fire had upon the populace. Cherapukhin's portrayal of a fire that simply could not be tamed is a notable example. His description is echoed by similar accounts provided by Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin. In their short chapter entitled '*Pervaia Bombezhka*' (The First Bombing) they state that at least half of all the testimonies they collected covered the subject of the Badaev warehouses³⁰. The diary of Iurii Riabinkin describes the event in detail. Riabinkin wrote that 'The results of the Fascist bombing are tragic. The whole sky is filled with smoke... smoke, smoke reaches everywhere and even here you are surrounded by this acrid smell. My throat stings because of it'³¹.

Adamovich and Granin underline that the outbreak of war is particularly keenly remembered and that this represents for many Leningraders the fateful night of 8 September 1941³². This event, witnessed by so many, created a *community of memory*³³. It also created a 'sense of the sacredness of a given territory', in this

³⁰ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 290.

³¹ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 288.

³² Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga* p. 291.

³³ David Ohana, 'Kfar Etzion: The Community of Memory and the Myth of Return' (p. 146).

instance, the Vitebsk freight yards³⁴. The sacrality of the Badaev narrative has been legitimised by the myth that its significance is only comprehended within this community. Consequently, Arkhipova, Rozanova and numerous other *blokadniki* maintain that the Badaev calamity was played down in official narratives. On the opening page of *Blokadnaia Kniga* a survivor points out of her window remarking that 'Over there you can see the Badaev warehouses'³⁵. Adamovich and Granin are well aware of the significance of this remark and of the continuing role which this narrative plays as a mobilising symbol in veterans' testimonies.

Dell Upton observes that we are 'vulnerable to the influence of the architectural and human spaces beyond our bodily boundaries'³⁶. Within our immediate range of perception lies our 'sensorimotor space' which creates a 'receptive field' through which we navigate everyday spaces³⁷. Within these everyday spaces we repeat individual actions which in turn 'become practices and clusters of practices become social formations'. Furthermore, in 'the give and take of everyday life we learn the personal and social meanings of our agency'³⁸. The individual action of walking to the freight yards to dig up the sweet earth became a premonition of all later social practices associated with life during the siege. From the journeys to the

³⁴ David Ohana, 'Kfar Etzion...p. 154.

³⁵ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 17.

³⁶ Dell Upton, 'Architecture in Everyday Life', *New Literary History*, 33:4 (Autumn 2002), 707-23 (p. 717).

³⁷ Dell Upton, 'Architecture in Everyday Life' (p. 717).

³⁸ Dell Upton, 'Architecture in Everyday Life' (p. 718).

ice holes in the Neva to the dragging of the dead on sleds to the cemeteries, all these extraordinary social practices found their precedent in this preliminary collective act.

Aleksandr Lodkin wrote in his dairy that he recalled his heart skipping a beat during those first air raids. From this point onwards Lodkin realised that 'the give and take of everyday life' would have a direct impact upon his fate³⁹. The personal and social meanings derived from the bombings brought with them a sense of comprehension that from now on all social practices would be defined by one single factor, namely, the quest for survival.

The *community of memory* emanating from the bombings was also given added force by the fact that on that day significant numbers of young Leningraders were on bomb disposal duty on the city's rooftops. A number of published testimonies record the impact of witnessing the calamity from a bird's eye view. Nadezhda Leshchinskaia was one of them. As she poured sand on unexploded incendiaries she watched as a bomb landed on the warehouses in the distance. She then witnessed how the fire raged across the freight yards⁴⁰. Ivan Kudrin watched as Leningrad became caught in the grip 'of a ring of fire' which appeared to rage without end⁴¹. Down below Vladimir Arro recalled this day as the first occasion when his family ran to the bomb shelter. The next morning Arro and his brother were stunned to see that a building adjacent to their home had been 'rent from top to bottom'⁴².

³⁹ Aleksandr Lodkin, 'Blokadnoe Pis'mo'.

⁴⁰ Aleksei Elkin, 'Leningradka Nadezhda Isaevna Leshchinskaia medal' "Za oboronnu Leningrada" ona poluchila v deiatnadtsat' let', interview with Nadezhda Leshchinskaia for the *Agenstvo Evreivskikh Novostei* <www.aen.ru> [accessed 16/11/2005].

⁴¹ Ivan Kudrin, 'Zhivy. Vyderzhim. Pobedim, Pravda o Voine'.

⁴² Vladimir Arro, 'Dom Pribezhishcha', *Zvezda*, no.4, 2002, *Zhurnalnyi Zal* <magazines.russ.ru> [accessed 09/06/2005].

Andrei Vasilievskii regretted the fact that the catastrophe could not have been predicted. Otherwise, he would have bought up more products from the shops in advance. Around this time he described evacuees as reminiscent of rats fleeing from a sinking ship. Vasilievskii portrays an extraordinary scene following the bombing. An elderly *babushka* clutching an icon sways from side to side muttering prayers. She attracts a following of other women who begin to parrot her words. 'What is this about?' asks Vasilievskii. He then muses that perhaps they are pleading with God to stop the fire from the Badaev warehouses.

He also describes the rumours as akin to the sparks which ignited the initial fire. The realisation that it was the food stores that had been hit spread from 'mouth to mouth' and across 'street to street'. Already, Leningraders found themselves divided into two camps: the 'optimists' and those engaged in 'panic mongering'. Vasilievskii witnessed the former group scolding the latter exclaiming, 'Who told *you* that all the supplies were stored in one place? Of course the government will have taken care of everything...' ⁴³

Sonya O. Rose writes that, 'War is an especially critical juncture, since people in a nation-state are called on to unify in defense of their supposedly common "way of life"'. War also 'transforms the everyday in unparalleled ways' ⁴⁴. The realisation that war was no longer a possibility but a reality immediately turned the site of the Badaev warehouses into a *lieu de memoire*, a site of memory which in turn created a memory environment (*milieu de memoire*).

⁴³ Anna Vasilievskaja, '*Kniga o Zhizni*'.

⁴⁴ Sonya O. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain', *American Historical Review*, 103: 4 (October 1998), 1147-1176 (p. 1148).

It is also the first siege story which creates a sense of collective memory. Attilio Favorini describes this type of shared memory as constructed upon 'a set of recollections, repetitions, and recapitulations that are socially, morally, or politically useful for a group or community'. In contrast to history which tends to be 'individually generated, univocal, and responsive to evidentiary protocols. Collective memory tends to be group generated, multivocal, and responsive to a social framework'. History is 'reinforced by rewriting' while 'collective memory is reinforced by social occasions such as rites and commemorations...as well as by body practices such as gestural behavior and proprieties'⁴⁵.

The digging up of scorched earth opened up the possibility of creating a social framework through later 'repetitions and recapitulations' which would come to define the 'body practices' and 'gestural behaviour' of the 'imagined' wartime community. As there are points of contestation surrounding this story it is also a multivocal narrative.

What is interesting is that although the myth of the Badaev warehouses clearly had a function which was socially useful for the community at the time it might have been expected to fade away through the years. The fact that has not happened and that these 'repetitions and recapitulations' continue means that there must be an additional factor behind the resilience of this myth. This stems from the manner in which the wartime community is 'imagined'.

⁴⁵ Attilio Favorini, 'History, Collective Memory, and Aeschylus' Persians', *Theatre Journal*, 55:1 (March 2003), 99-111 (p. 100).

Brian Keith Axel laments the fact that the 'imagination has somehow fallen from the purview of anthropology's modality of self-critique'. He suggests that 'the use of the term "imagination" may well have become part of an emergent anthropological normativity'⁴⁶. Within the context of the Badaev myth imagination also needs to be identified as an analytical category in itself. Of course, *blokadniki* are also imagining the Badaev story in a certain style. This is particularly noticeable in their pronouncements concerning the prevalence of foreign spies active in the city because as stated above it demonstrates the successful instrumentalisation of Soviet political myths amongst the populace.

The Badaev myth also defines the imagined community through what Axel terms an 'Ethics of Exclusion'⁴⁷. He states that 'citizens *must* live the politics of their imagined community *within* the territory defined by that community's imaginings...'⁴⁸ Romanov, Arkhipova, Rozanova and others shared a sensory experience which cannot be shared by outsiders. The citation of these sensory memories gives *blokadniki* a sense of confidence that their evaluations are correct. Consequently, the Badaev story and the collecting of sweet earth provide an initial 'portrayal of a community that, *within* the imagination, surges, like a sociological solidity'⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Brian Keith Axel, 'Poverty of the Imagination', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76:1 (Winter 2003), 111-133 (p. 112).

⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸ Brian Keith Axel, 'Poverty of the Imagination' (pp. 126-27).

⁴⁹ Brian Keith Axel, 'Poverty of the Imagination' (p. 122).

This leads us to the central question of why such myths are imagined in the first place. According to Benedict Anderson, though members of the imagined community 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them...*in the minds* of each lives the image of their communion'⁵⁰.

Consequently, repetitions and recapitulations of popular myths are acts of communion between a community's members. They are recited as a means of confirming shared assumptions and understandings which in turn ensure the continued survival of the 'imagined' community.

CONCLUSION

Harrison Salisbury maintained that 'Not a person in Leningrad on the morning after the Badayev fire had reason to doubt that the city faced the grimmest trial in its history'⁵¹. He also reminds us that it was not only the warehouses which were hit. The next night the zoo was bombed killing the elephant called Betty. 'Betty's death throes went on for hours and her howling terrified those who heard her'.

Injured dogs in the Pavlov Institute 'howled like dirges during the attacks'⁵².

The story concerning the zoo had at least a partially happy ending. Betty perished but the hippo miraculously survived the winter of 1941-42. Twelve year old

Marina Tkacheva was scouring the grounds of the zoo for dandelions during the

⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p. 15.

⁵¹⁻⁵² Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, pp. 291 and 297.

early Summer of 1942 when she was astonished to behold a living hippo. Its survival is described by Adamovich and Granin as 'a genuine Leningrad legend'⁵³.

The veteran I. Zapadalov, like so many others portrayed the bombing as highly symbolic. He described the raid as an 'impudent, shocking and unpredictable physical attack' and condemned it as the 'ultimate embodiment of vandalism'. Again, in retrospect he asked, 'How many dependents', workers' and childrens' rations were consumed by that fiery tornado?' Thus, again a link between the later food crisis and the bombing is clearly inferred. Zapadalov described the fire as the beginning of an 'infernal festival of Satan'⁵⁴. Like Salisbury's use of the words 'red eclipse' Zapadalov is also placing the fire within the realm of eschatological myth⁵⁵.

Irina Paperno identifies the connection between 'the twin notions of "testimony" and "trauma"'. These imply both 'recollection and revelation' as a means of 'mastering the past'⁵⁶. The suddenness of the attack created a trauma which destabilised 'narrative, memory and identity'. As Anne Cubilié and Carl Good remind us, testimony itself often emerges 'as a *response* to trauma'. This response resists any potential effacement caused by impositions from external 'juridical,

⁵³ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 228.

⁵⁴ I. Zapadalov, 'Nesostoiavshiisia Iunga', *Neva*, no.1, 2004, Zhurnalnyi Zal <magazines. russ.ru> [accessed 08/06/2005].

⁵⁵ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, p. 289.

⁵⁶ Irina Paperno, 'Personal Accounts of the Soviet Experience', *Kritika*, 3: 4 (Autumn 2002), 577-610 (pp. 577-78).

literary, psychic and cultural fields'⁵⁷. Consequently, while referring to the collective trauma unleashed by the Badaev bombings *blokadniki* are resolute that their assertions are accurate.

In summary, the reality that the destruction of the Badaev warehouses was not as critical as it seemed at the time has had little bearing on later mythic production. This story demonstrates not only the persistence of myth but the manner in which myths can be created as a kind of improvised response to a traumatic event. The Badaev narrative is primarily a manifestation of that response and an example of how trauma can be reconstituted as testimony.

The Badaev narrative demonstrates above all the tenacity of sensory memory. As long as *blokadniki* cite sensory experiences as the basis for their evaluations this myth will remain resilient to decay. Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin in response to the testimony of Nina Abkina describe this tendency succinctly. 'Her story and her depiction of the significance of that smoke make it clear why the picture of that dreadful inferno is an image which has entered the realms of all the Leningraders tales'⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Anne Cubilié and Carl Good, 'Introduction: The Future of Testimony', *Discourse*, 25:1&2 (2003), 4 -18 (p. 7).

⁵⁸ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, p. 294.

THE ROAD OF LIFE AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED

*‘Tol’ko chernyi dym klubitsia,
Tol’ko rel’sy ubegaiut,
I oruzhie sverkaet,
V svete dnia’.*

*‘Only black smoke swirls around,
Only rails stretch into the distance,
And weapons glint,
In the light of the day’¹.*

Voevaia Zheleznodorozhnaia

Dmitri and Daniil Pokrassov and I. Shvartsa, 1942.

The thoroughfare officially designated as Military Automobile Highway no.101 which was subsequently immortalised as the *doroga zhizni* or *road of life* reached out from besieged Leningrad, cutting its way across the exposed ice of lake Ladoga and over to mainland Russia. The story behind the road’s construction has been extensively documented by Soviet scholars and a brief historical background is provided in the earlier chapter covering siege historiography.

Soviet commentators eulogised the *doroga zhizni* as a locus of heroic deeds and of immense self-sacrifice given by those who served along this perilous route.

Less emphasis though, was placed upon the brutal realities of life upon the ice².

¹ Dmitri Pokrassov, Daniil Pokrassov and Ia. Shvartsa, *Voevaia Zheleznodorozhnaia*, published on the website *Staryi Motiv Zheleznykh Dorog* <www.admin.debryansk.ru/~press/Personal/rsong/rrsongs4.html> [accessed 18/04/2006].

² Harrison Salisbury lamented the fact that during his research for his book *The 900 Days* he had failed to obtain any ‘satisfactory or dramatic account of the Ladoga ice road’. Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad*, p. 594.

Contemporary testimonies provide a more comprehensive picture; a picture which depicts the inherent ambivalence which lies at the heart of *doroga zhizni* narratives. In these recollections the *road of life* becomes more akin to a road of death, a path to salvation which was blocked all too often by sudden and merciless shelling which rained down from the skies above. Evacuees were vulnerable to attack and at the same time experienced a sense of disorientation after they had been removed from the strange yet familiar routines of siege existence.

Zinaida Shishova expressed what many of her fellow Leningraders must have felt when she wrote, 'Now our world itself has become the blockade. Now our world stretches no further than Leningrad'³. Consequently, when Leningraders found themselves thrust into the light of life on the mainland many struggled to adapt to the world outside. This was particularly true when it came to small children, many of whom remembered little of what it was like to live in prewar Leningrad.

While evacuation narratives foreground the apparent contradiction between the *road of life* as a place of death and destruction this dual meaning arguably serves only to underline the inherent sacrality of *doroga zhizni* narratives.

The combination of both sacred and profane stories also mirrors that inherent

³ Zinaida Shishova, *Blokada – Poema*, in the collection entitled *Pobeda - Poety o Podvige Leningrada v Velikou Otechestvennou Voine* (Leningrad: 1970), p. 514.

ambivalence which Giorgio Agamben regards as a fundamental aspect of sacral discourse⁴.

While the road's construction was indeed a heroic tale the myth of Soviet heroism tends to overlook the psychological traumas and acute suffering experienced by evacuees. The ambiguous character of sacred things constitutes both a sense of veneration and revulsion. Recollections of life along the *doroga zhizni* convey a sense of sacred horror while the souls that were selected for evacuation might have wondered whether they had been fortunate or accursed. The *road of life* was therefore revered by the citizens of Leningrad as a vital lifeline but at the same time many had no compunction to travel across the lake. The celebrated soprano Galina Vishnevskaya was one of those who elected to stay at home rather than face what she described as 'a great test'⁵.

The tale of the *doroga zhizni* also echoes Agamben's analysis of how the sacred has come to be defined in the modern era. Again, it underlines the reality that the past century subjected humanity to an unprecedented level of brutality. Agamben maintains that this epoch, in its entirety was 'without precedent' particularly as it manifested itself in the 'most profane and banal ways'⁶. As stated earlier Agamben is referring primarily to the Shoah but the Great Patriotic

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p. 78.

⁵ Galina Vishnevskaya, *A Russian Story*, p. 43.

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*...p. 114.

War through its countless 'sacrificial veils' further demonstrates the efficacy of Agamben's argument⁷.

The *homo sacer* therefore confronts both 'sacrifice and immolation'. The sacred or 'bare' life of the *homo sacer* 'constitutes the immediate referent of sovereign violence' because the sacred man is both revered and considered sacrificeable⁸. The story of the *doroga zhizni* therefore embraces the 'ambiguity of the sacred', a mythologeme which reminds us that *sacer esto* is also a curse⁹.

Sacrifice was never far away on the *road of life* and the transportation of supplies along this route was a hazardous undertaking. Harrison Salisbury states that the populace quickly became aware of the bravery demanded of their counterparts as they attempted to establish a functioning channel for supplies into the city. While the city's fate hung in the balance people 'believed in the road, and it was at this time they first began to call it 'the Road of Life'¹⁰.

Salisbury also observes that the arrival of white bread from the mainland was a source of wonder as the populace had grown accustomed to black loaves baked predominantly with food substitutes. The bread was 'holy' and the 'whitest of the white'¹¹. The fact that it came from *Novaia Ladoga*, the sister town of *Staraiia Ladoga*, once the capital of ancient *Rus*', appeared to invest it with additional spiritual resonances. Finally, the temporary nature of the ice road, which

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*...p. 114.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*...p. 74.

⁹ Refer to W. Warde Fowler, 'The Original Meaning of the Word Sacer', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 1911, 57-63 (p. 57).

¹⁰ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 422.

¹¹ Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days*...p. 422.

gradually disappeared during the late Spring thaw merely added to the impression that the *doroga zhizni* was an almost otherworldly or unearthly place.

THE OLD IAROSLAVL TRACT

These spiritual overtones were also underlined by the route itself. Salisbury informs us that for a brief time up until the recapture of Tikhvin on 9 December 1941 the ice road traversed 'one of the ancient forest routes of old Russia'¹². This was the route of the old Iaroslav tract which made its way through the cranberry bogs and pine forests rich in bilberries which border the lake on the eastern side. Much of this region remains unspoiled and provides a home to numerous wild animals such as the lynx, marten and wild boar¹³.

In fact, the rutted track which led finally to the small town of Zaborye had only been established a few days before the recapture of Tikhvin. Yet, it is symbolic that along the route of the Iaroslav tract lay the ancient settlement of *Staraia Ladoga*. This trading outpost was once a meeting point between Finns, Slavs and Scandinavians. Until 864 it was ruled by Riurik, the founder of ancient *Rus*'¹⁴.

¹² Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* p. 409.

¹³ *Staraia Ladoga :The Ancient Capital of Rus* <<http://oldladoga.spb.ru/eng/history/>> [accessed 24/07/2006].

¹⁴ The Vologda Oblast Government <<http://www.vologda-oblast.ru/maibn.asp>> [accessed 24/07/2006].

It is perhaps ironic that St. Petersburg, so often denounced for embodying all that was modish, European and implicitly non-Russian had during its darkest hour reached out to the region which was once the spiritual heartbeat of ancient *Rus'*. *Staraia Ladoga* had in fact been a flourishing market town long before the establishment of Moscow or even Novgorod. Thus, the *road of life* traversed ancient ground, which was almost the road of spiritual life, a muddy precarious track which reconnected suffering Leningrad with Russia's earliest settlements. Hitler had sought to crush 'the soul of the Slavonic people' by squeezing the life out of besieged Leningrad¹⁵. The route of the Old Iaroslavl Tract provided the only possible means of thwarting Hitler's ambitions. If the spiritual home of that Slavic soul which Hitler strove to crush lay anywhere, it was surely in *Staraia Ladoga* where the very concept of Russia, or *Rus'* first became a reality.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD FROM WAR TO PEACE

In his book: *If not now, when?* Primo Levi portrays scenes of chaos and confusion during the closing days of the war when a group of Russian and Polish Jewish refugees suddenly find themselves at liberty to go where they pleased. After the Nazis had retreated the Soviet army took command of their camp in Glogau. Then, without prior warning, 'with no farewells, no good-byes, they all went away... There were no more guards, the gates were open...' ¹⁶ The return to normality

¹⁵ Quoted in Nikolai Shumilov, *V Dni Blokady*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Primo Levi, *If Not Now, When?* (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1987), p. 239.

occurred without prior warning and the abruptness of this change made the camp inmates' new situation seem all the more bewildering and strange. In contrast to this lay their previous lives in the camps which still appeared familiar and routine.

Jack Klajman, who survived the Warsaw ghetto described how liberation brought with it unexpected feelings. 'After my initial joy, however, my feelings began to change...Life for the past six years had consisted of nothing more than existing hour-to-hour and day-to-day, just fighting for survival. There was no time and no reason to consider the future'¹⁷. Another Holocaust survivor, who had played the cello in the camp orchestra at Auschwitz wrote that after liberation: 'Everything was void...I didn't want to acknowledge anything – but my sister finally persuaded me to come out of the *Block*'¹⁸. Klajman could only allow himself to grieve for those members of his family he had lost once the quest for survival was over.

The release from such continuous strain also allowed repressed feelings to rise to the surface. For some, such as Klajman and the cellist in Auschwitz (her name is undisclosed in Anton Gill's book) they were confronted with a void. Klajman stated that when his initial rejoicing faded 'the reality of my tragedy began to sink in'¹⁹. Consequently, there is a sense of ambivalence which strikes many of those confronted by the reality that war is at an end.

¹⁷ Jack Klajman, *Out of the Ghetto* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), p. 128.

¹⁸ Anton Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors*, 'A' pp. 403 - 4.

¹⁹ Jack Klajman, *Out of the Ghetto*...p. 128.

Clearly, this is not only the case for civilians whose lives have been directly affected by conflict but also for soldiers. A generation earlier, First World War combatant Frederick J. Hodges had expressed similar feelings on hearing that the Great War was over. 'I was trying to realise that it was all over; that I was alive and that I had a life to live. For seven months I had lived a day at a time, but now I could look forward as well as back...Now, suddenly, unexpectedly, almost unreasonably, it was all over'²⁰. The word 'unreasonably' stands out. Without preparation or any accompanying explanation Corporal Hodges was instructed to lay down his weapon. Consequently, the manner in which wars end can be just as disorientating for those involved as the circumstances in which conflict first breaks out.

Brigitte Friang, a French resistance fighter who survived the Zwodau concentration camp in Czechoslovakia vividly describes this sense of disorientation as she returns home. 'My parents seemed like babies to me. They would never mention the camps, the war. It seemed childish. I felt a thousand years old...We were like people coming home from the moon...we knew a different reality'²¹.

Friang realises that her initial physical recovery masked deeper psychological wounds. While her waking hours were spent in peacetime, at night she dreamt of life in the camps. For Corporal Hodges, faced by a complete lack of comprehension of his wartime experiences on his return home the only solution was to reserve all

²⁰ Frederick James Hodges, *Men of 18 in 1918* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd., 1988) p. 200.

²¹ Shelley Saywell, *Women at War: First Hand Accounts from World War II to El Salvador* (Toronto: Viking, 1985), p. 71.

discussions of the war for meetings with old comrades. It was not until he was in his late 80's that he felt able to share his story with a wider audience²².

Interestingly, for Hodges it was a return to the battlefields of Northern France which triggered this process. This echoes the experiences of former Warsaw Home Army veterans Barbara Black and Ida Kasprzak. Kasprzak stated that joining fellow veterans on the anniversaries of the Warsaw uprising released her from the 'emotion and fear' which had long remained contained within her²³.

Within the context of the Soviet experience the concept of long term psychological wounds or post-traumatic disorder remains a controversial topic. Catherine Merridale maintains that 'The myth, and it is almost universally believed, is that almost all Russians, whatever their age, got through the war without suffering mental trauma'. She goes on to state that 'the story of the Leningraders' war neurosis has vanished from the memory'. She was assured by a colleague from St. Petersburg that 'there was no evidence of post-traumatic stress after the blockade'. Merridale regards these statements as part of wider mythopoetic tendencies which underline the myth of 'unbreakable mental resilience'²⁴. Yet she also states that 'Coping, indeed, provided people with a sense of purpose and even pride'²⁵. In short the 'myth was nurtured that Russians did not give way to pain'²⁶.

²² Refer for example to the preface of *Men of 18 in 1918* (p. 7-9) where Frederick Hodges discusses how his visit to the battlefields of northern France became the inspiration for his later writings.

²³ Shelley Saywell; *Women at War...* p. 129.

²⁴ Catherine Merridale, 'Trauma and Shell Shock in Twentieth Century Russia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1: 35 (2000), 39-55, (p. 48).

²⁵ Catherine Merridale, *Trauma and Shell Shock...* p. 49.

²⁶ Catherine Merridale, *Trauma and Shell Shock...* p. 52.

Janusz Bardach, a survivor of the gulag, describes how the concepts of depression and trauma were often rejected on ideological grounds. Bardach, a 'feldsher' (medical orderly) in a wartime prison hospital in the district of Kolyma encounters a depressed poet called Misha Perlman who has been mentally shattered by his arrest, interrogation and deportation to Siberia. But a fellow doctor (Sitkin) who is responsible for the patient rebukes Bardach for attempting to understand Perlman's crippling depression with the retort, 'What do you mean 'depressed'? Depressed people don't belong in the hospital. In the aristocracy its known as hypochondria... All the rich people who had nothing to do suffered from depression'²⁷.

Katiusha Mikhailova, a former Soviet marine provided another explanation. After the war she returned to Leningrad to discover that her entire family had perished during the siege. Yet she maintained that the war had made her stronger and that this made it easier to cope with her loss. She also stated that 'We came home to face all the destruction and severe food shortages. We worked eighteen hours a day to reconstruct. Maybe that is why we didn't have much post-combat stress...we were too occupied with the present'²⁸.

Merridale asserted that coping provided individuals with a sense of purpose.

Mikhailova's case demonstrates that the reverse can also be true in that gaining an initial sense of purpose helped her to cope with her loss. It is therefore possible that vast reconstruction projects following the Great Patriotic War enabled many

²⁷ Janusz Bardach and Kathleen Gleeson, *Man is Wolf to Man: Surviving Stalin's Gulag*, (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 1998), p. 344.

²⁸ Shelley Saywell, *Women at War*...p. 157.

veterans to focus on the challenges ahead as opposed to becoming absorbed in painful memories from the past.

Mikhailova had one advantage over Friang, Kasprzak and Corporal Hodges. Her wartime experiences had been shared by her fellow Leningraders. Though she despaired on her return that 'Nothing was the same' she also stated that 'The people there had suffered as we had at the front. Women and children knew all about suffering',²⁹. Her experiences were therefore not met by incomprehension but by shared understanding. The fact that such a large proportion of the Soviet population knew the horrors of war arguably brought combatants and civilians closer together. This could potentially alleviate feelings of alienation which often arise when soldiers return to life in peacetime.

At the opposite end of the spectrum lies the incomprehension and even hostility faced by American soldiers returning from Vietnam. In the case of female nurses Shad Meshad, Juddy Marron and many others their contribution received scant public attention. They were subsequently extremely reluctant to 'come out' and admit that they had taken part in such a controversial war. The result was that inner feelings were repressed leading to recurrent nightmares and other manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder ³⁰.

²⁹ Shelley Saywell, *Women at War...*p. 158.

³⁰ Shelley Saywell, *Women at War...*p. 257

This was clearly not the case with demobbed Soviet soldiers whose war service was already being eulogised by Soviet propaganda. Nevertheless, they still had to cross the threshold between conflict and peacetime. In addition, Soviet soldiers who came from territories which had been occupied by the Germans returned to a countryside ravaged by war and changed almost beyond all recognition. Yet at least where Katiusha Mikhailova was concerned conscription into the vast task of reconstruction enabled her to attain a new sense of purpose. This alleviated, in part, the overwhelming sense of loss she must have felt on her return to Leningrad.

DOROGA ZHIZNI NARRATIVES

During the interviews the subject of evacuation was covered in most detail by Aleksandr Cherapukhin, Viktor Lodkin and Natalia Velezhova. Tat'iana Letenkova was evacuated to the Kongur region of Kazakhstan and Viktoriia Ruslanova travelled to the Urals. For all of them, the journey brought with it unforgettable images and experiences. Perhaps the most resilient of these memories was the sight of people dying in considerable numbers on the other side of lake Ladoga. Almost all of the evacuees interviewed remembered receiving hot *kasha* on the far side of the lake but also recalled that evacuees

who were overcome with the desire to eat too quickly often collapsed beside these distribution points. It was the inherent irony of witnessing people die after having survived the siege that imprinted itself most firmly upon the memory of Viktor Lodkin, Velezhova and others.

Aleksandr Cherapukhin's story is worth quoting at length because it touches upon a number of key themes which characterise blockade evacuation narratives, 'I recall it was in the winter of 1942 that the city government decided to evacuate small children and wounded. We were later evacuated across lake Ladoga. We drove across in a car in April. I was confused because it seemed as if the car was actually swimming through the water. The ice was already melting. We had to keep the roof of the car clear because we were told that enemy attacks could come suddenly. Then shells would hit the ice and cars would disappear under it. Many people died when they were trapped in their cars.

'At the other side they gave us bread and hot *kasha*. But I remember people weeping because some of the children died. They began to eat but their systems could not take it. Of course, this was awful. Guess what the only thing I took from home was? An old gramophone player! It had a small horn and fitted into a suitcase.

Mama scolded me asking, “Why do you want to take this? What about a scarf or clothes?!” I burst into tears because I so wanted to take it. Now, I have no idea why this was the case. I then pulled it along on a sled. We went across *Liteinyi Most* and I remember the snow piled up in side streets. You could only walk on one side of the street. We made it to the station and in the coach was a small *burzhuika*. We warmed ourselves at the fire. The train was very slow. It stopped at night while they repaired rails ahead which had been bombed. When we finally caught the train south they refused to receive any money for the tickets. They exclaimed, “Ahh! You are from Leningrad? Then just take a seat”³¹.

Perhaps the most memorable part of Cherapukhin’s statement is his reference to the gramophone player. He described packing the gramophone away, placing it carefully on a sled and eventually standing at the station holding the suitcase in his hand. He recalled with some humour the fact that his mother was stunned by this odd choice but also stated that he was absolutely determined to rescue this object.

Mona Korte describes such a possession as ‘an object of the last moment’³².

Korte states that many German Jewish survivors cherish certain objects which retain their symbolism through the decades. For Paul Kuttner it was a hand towel his mother packed for him as he left Berlin on a *Kindertransport*

³¹ BL8/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, pp. 15-17.

³² Mona Korte, ‘Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch: Objects of the Last Moment in Memory and Narration’, *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 23:1, (Autumn 2004), 109-120 (p. 110). Korte is also citing Tilman Habermas, *Geliebte Objekte: Symbole und Instrumente der Identitätsbildung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999) p. 369.

bound for England. The hand towel is now an exhibit in the Jewish Museum in Berlin³³.

The experience of evacuation is described above as a threshold. Along with the first night of bombing on 8 September 1941 the moment of evacuation forms one of the two key definitive thresholds in siege testimonies. They delineate life in the present from existence in the past. Cherapukhin, knew that life would never be the same after the siege. He therefore chose a memento which for him could encapsulate the essence of his former life.

Korte turns our attention to the fact that objects can be 'bearers of memory',³⁴.

Interestingly, she mentions Kristallnacht, the cold winter of 1938 and the moment of evacuation as the key points in testimonies by Jewish children placed on *Kinder* transports³⁵. Similarly, the Badaev bombing, the cold winter of 1941-42 and then the call up for evacuation punctuate many siege narratives. Alongside these larger structural markers 'are partial experiences, with textual and structural similarities in the recounting of events'³⁶. Objects in the form of 'keepsakes, mementos, clothing, and tools' can present 'a connection to childhood experience' which later becomes 'a bridge to memory

³³⁻³⁴ Mona Korte, 'Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch...' (pp. 109-110).

³⁵⁻³⁶ Mona Korte, 'Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch...' (p. 110).

or a bracket for an event'³⁷. These objects can reveal entire 'thematic clusters'³⁸. Cherapukhin recalls not only the gramophone but the image of himself dragging it along after him towards the *Liteinyi* bridge. Then he recalls gripping onto the case at the station despite his mother's scolding. In his mind he felt as if he was hanging on to a former life.

Korte describes such objects as 'larger than life in the memory'³⁹. She also states that as one suitcase was often all that was permitted on such occasions 'difficult decisions had to be made about what must be left behind'⁴⁰. Yet Cherapukhin did not find the decision difficult. As Korte confirms, 'A sausage, washcloth, rucksack, lost manuscript, or hand towel—these become indispensable as aids in the act of remembering'⁴¹. They bring together the 'psychology of personal objects and object-relations' and 'extend their message through time'⁴². They also trigger 'entire thematic clusters, making them, in a double movement, keepers of memory'⁴³. Cherapukhin regarded the gramophone as a link to his former identity, it was an emblem and a confirmation of the existence of his former life.

The other trigger for a thematic cluster present in Cherapukhin's narrative is the sight of hot *kasha*. He, along with other respondents who recalled

³⁷⁻³⁸ Mona Korte, 'Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch...' (p. 110).

³⁹⁻⁴⁰ Mona Korte, 'Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch...' (p. 111).

⁴¹⁻⁴³ Mona Korte, 'Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch...' (p. 120).

being fed on the far side of lake Ladoga remembered mixed feelings as the joy of receiving food was combined with witnessing the chaos at food distribution points.

Natalia Velezhova provided the following short account. 'First there was not one *doroga zhizni* but two. The first went across Ladoga and the second went up to Kronstadt. I have a relative who served on the *road of life* throughout the whole war. So many people died there because they ate too quickly. Do you understand? It is forbidden. Yet they ate too quickly'. At this point Viktor Lodkin intervened, 'I remember a doctor running along the banks of the lake yelling, 'Do not feed them!' ('*Ne kormi! Ne kormi!*'). Velezhova continued, 'Well, they gave them meat at first. It was just too much for them'⁴⁴.

Viktoriiia Ruslanova recalled, 'Well, we were evacuated during the summer of 1942. The most dangerous aspect was the shelling. But on the other side, the most important thing was not to feed people too much. I remember hot *kasha*. Many people died there. My aunt though was aware of this danger and was very attentive that we should not be given too much food. After that I remember that when we reached the Urals we were left at a station. It was early in the morning'⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 9.

⁴⁵ BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 8.

These statements are also supported by historical evidence. Harrison Salisbury describes the evacuation process as 'chaotic' and states that 'Thousands died on the ice'⁴⁶. He confirms that like Ruslanova and Tat'iana Letenkova the majority of evacuees 'were sent to the Urals or to Central Asian cities'⁴⁷.

James Krasner wrote that 'objects unite the past and present selves'⁴⁸. In this case it is the bowl of *kasha* that triggers a thematic cluster. The *kasha* represents the joy of receiving food on the other side of the lake. It also signifies the achievement of survival. Nevertheless, it bears darker connotations because it symbolises chaos, queues and deaths at food distribution points. As Krasner goes on to write, 'The memory mirror functions not through narrative but through symbol; objects allow a quick, instantaneous access to a significant experience'⁴⁹. Such objects enable us to 'see our past suddenly illuminated as a dazzlingly bright image, rather than an extended story'⁵⁰.

The sight of people dying on the other side of the lake left a mark on numerous other evacuation narratives. Galina Vishnevskaja recalled: 'On the other shore food awaited those who made it. It was a great test. People driven mad by hunger threw themselves on the bread, disregarding the doctors' warnings that they should eat slowly. Many who had survived the famine did not survive the

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days...* (p. 494 and footnote no. 4 at the bottom of the page).

⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰ James Krasner, 'Accumulated Lives: Metaphor, Materiality, and the Homes of the Elderly', *Literature and Medicine*, 24: 2 (Autumn 2005), 209-230 (p. 214).

long-desired piece of bread'⁵¹. Vishnevskaja touches upon the painful irony that the one thing evacuees desired most often led to their deaths.

Ol'ga Smirnova, was evacuated to Alatyr' in Chuvashia where her grandmother lived. Although only a young girl she had resolutely said to her father that 'The *road of life* is now open. Do you what you want but I do not want to die'. Her father managed to arrange their evacuation during the Spring of 1942. Smirnova recalls being crushed in an 'impossibly full bus'. At one moment a bomb fell in front of the bus punching a hole through the thin melting ice on the lake. The driver she recalls 'miraculously' steered round the crater. They were then transported in a truck used previously for carrying animal fodder. Eventually, they arrived at a food distribution point where Smirnova was given very salty, weak noodle soup (*lapsha*). She recalled that it was watered down in order to prevent deaths from overeating. 'Nevertheless, many died. They just ate too much'. Two sights struck the young Smirnova in particular. When she arrived at her grandmother's she shook out her shirt which was 'alive with lice'. Yet, she regarded them as a sign of her new life. 'I must have caught them on the train. Lice could not survive in Leningrad'⁵².

⁵¹ Galina Vishnevskaja, *A Russian Story*...pp. 43-44. Though Vishnevskaja did not travel along the *doroga zhizni* herself she recounted the experiences of her Aunt's family during and after evacuation.

⁵² Anna Maiskaia, '*Nas spasli Mamina Zelion*'.

If the myth of a united wartime community and the maintenance of discipline and order characterise many blockade testimonies evacuation narratives chart what happened when all this broke down. Like Cherapukhin, many Leningraders were evacuated in the spring of 1942. The ice was melting and they modified their vehicles with the knowledge that the ice was perilously thin in places. Cherapukhin recalled that the car was ‘swimming’ across the lake. Valentin Makarov, similar to Cherapukhin was evacuated in April 1942. The ice was covered with a layer of water half a metre deep. Cars resembled ‘torpedo boats’ as the water created ‘whiskers around their bonnets’⁵³.

Rav Zusia also witnessed a truck in front of them simply ‘vanish’ under the ice. Speaking of those who died on the far banks of the lake he declares that ‘Their systems were not used to such amounts and could not cope’. After Zusia and his siblings were ‘packed’ into a goods wagon they pleaded with their mother to hand over the remaining rations. She scolded them and pointed at the corpses lying on the ground, ‘Do wish to end up like them?’ she asked⁵⁴.

None of the respondents interviewed mentioned that they had had problems with officials but Harrison Salisbury asserts that many behaved as if they were ‘lords of the lake’ demanding bribes for evacuation papers and transportation⁵⁵.

⁵³ Valentin Makarov, ‘*Cinen’kii Skromnyi Platochek...*’, *Novgorod*, no. 49 (499), 16 December 1999.

⁵⁴ Aleksei Elkin, ‘*Zashchitnik Leningrada*’.

⁵⁵ Salisbury maintained that ‘Everything depended on the chauffeurs’. Harrison Salisbury, *The 900 Days...*p. 499.

Travelling on foot to the shores of lake Ladoga was not permitted and any stragglers could find themselves arrested and even executed for speculation⁵⁶.

In reality, the small lakeside village of Kokkorevo became a graveyard for those who were either too weak or who did not possess enough valuables for bribes.

Liudmila Anapova found herself stranded on the Borisovaia ridge which was 'strewn with people and their luggage'. Her father possessed only eau de Cologne with which to bribe the 'lords of the lake'. The bribe was accepted and they were 'bundled' into the back of a truck. Unfortunately, the driver who had not slept for three days promptly crashed the truck into a pine tree. Passengers, including her father were thrown onto the ice. Her father died two months later as a result of his injuries leaving Anapova and her sister orphaned⁵⁷.

Anapova's story is reminiscent of Vladimir Kuliabko's account which is cited in the earlier chapter, 'In Defence of Myth: The Siege of Leningrad as Sacred Narrative'⁵⁸. Kuliabko witnessed the tragic consequences of a corrupt official who refused to assist evacuees who possessed neither valuables or money with which they could bribe him. He wondered how many corpses lying around him at a local station were the result of this guard's obduracy⁵⁹.

^{56 and 59} This is mentioned by Vladimir Kuliabko who was an official on duty near the lake. 'Blokadnyi Dnevnik', *Okonchanie*, Neva, 2004: 3.

⁵⁷ Liudmila Anapova, 'Siege of Leningrad Survivor Relives Her Childhood Terror'.

⁵⁸ Refer to p. 160.

Evacuation narratives are also triggered by what Gabriele Schwab terms a 'tropology of haunting'⁶⁰. This consists of objects and images which haunt the memory. Schwab also wrote that 'The dead pass on their unresolved conflicts to their descendants'. This is certainly the case with Ol'ga Mel'nikova-Pisarenko who was especially haunted by the image of a young child who fell from a mother's arms onto the ice during transportation. By the time she reached the child it had perished. Sadly, she could find no sign of documentation confirming the child's identity⁶¹. Mel'nikova-Pisarenko hated fish as they symbolised memories of the lake for her. At the time of her interview with Daniil Granin and Ales' Adamovich she also maintained that she still suffered from a phobia of water.

Schwab notes that 'violent histories continue to affect and disrupt the lives of those involved in them'. Individuals can also be 'haunted by the ghosts, that is, the unfinished business, of a previous generation'. Consequently, 'the buried ghosts of the past come to haunt language from within'⁶². Mel'nikova-Pisarenko was particularly fearful of being killed by a shell. She was sure that her body would subsequently be eaten by fish. Many years later she retained a fear of fish and water but also connected these images with the falling of a young

⁶⁰ Gabriele Schwab, 'Writing against Memory and Forgetting', *Literature and Medicine*, 25:1, (Spring 2006), 95-121 (p. 104). Schwab borrows this concept from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁶¹ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *The Book of the Blockade* (English version), p. 178.

⁶² Gabriele Schwab, 'Writing against Memory and Forgetting', (pp. 101-102).

child from its mother's arms. In that moment she had entered the narrative of that unknown family and their tragedy intersected with her own fears.

Hauntings also manifest themselves through objects. Apollon Davidson recalls the *kasha* mentioned by Lodkin and others. At the Finland railway station he was astonished to see a bowl of *kasha* and two sausages being handed out to each evacuee. This he exclaimed was simply 'unheard of'. Yet his initial joy was followed by despair as his train was held up for two days on the outskirts of Leningrad. 'Nobody received food' and soon officials began 'tossing dead bodies out onto the embankment'⁶³.

For Vladimir Gavrilov and Tat'iana Baskakova from the *Elektrosila* plant their memories of evacuation were encapsulated by two defining experiences. Gavrilov described the journey as agonisingly long. 'I remember going across in a car. On the other side was hot food. As a small boy the journey was so long. I was sure at one point that my mother had died in the car... Men and women were terrified going along that road because of the shelling'⁶⁴. At the moment he recalled his fear that his mother had died he briefly lost his composure but subsequently managed to finish his statement.

Baskakova recalled a sight which for her represented the entire war. 'I was evacuated to Novgorod Oblast' but at the end of June (1941) it was said that

⁶³ Vladimir Tol'ts, *Tsena Pobedy*, 2004.

⁶⁴ Interviews with *Vladimir Gavrilov* and *Tat'iana Baskakova*, *Elektrosila* plant, St. Petersburg, September 2006, tape reference, BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 13.

the Germans were approaching there so my mother had to come for me. After evacuation we travelled to the station called Bologoi. There we just stood and stood and stood. Everything was destroyed – from top to bottom. My mother held on to me not letting me go. We saw many killed people along that route. The deaths were terrible...⁶⁵

The image of Baskakova and her mother standing motionless as they beheld the ruined station of Bologoi is striking. The senseless destruction unleashed by war was fully comprehended. Her mother ‘held on’ to her as if trying to ensure that her daughter did not disappear into the chaos.

The moment Gavrilov was struck by panic as he became sure he had lost his mother bears an accompanying ‘image that assaults’ him almost ‘out of the blue’⁶⁶. As Schwab observes recollection of traumatic events often consists of ‘broken images and fragmented scenes’ which remain inside the respondent ‘like ruins of memory’. In some cases, stories can ‘seal over violent ruptures and wounds’⁶⁷. Yet, at other times, as with Gavrilov, ‘a few tears emerge, like traces leading away from an old wound’⁶⁸. In this instance, the connection between memory and accompanying emotions experienced at the time remains close. While Schwab states that some stories grow ‘over the wound like a second skin’ this is clearly not the case with Gavrilov⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 13.

⁶⁶⁻⁶⁷ Gabriele Schwab, ‘Writing against Memory and Forgetting’ (pp. 97 and 96).

⁶⁸⁻⁶⁹ Gabriele Schwab, ‘Writing against Memory and Forgetting’ (p. 96).

Schwab recalls a traumatic story told to her by her mother which recounted the bombing of a local childrens' playground during the war. 'In my mind, war stories were the stuff of the real world, a terrifying place'. Words became 'filled with skeletons' as her mother recalled the children's strewn bodies⁷⁰.

Faina Blagodarova, like Lodkin was haunted by the image of a column of trucks disappearing through the ice. She watched on as one truck after another disappeared into the lake. The 'screams were unimaginable'⁷¹.

Dystrophic evacuees leapt from the trucks but were injured as they fell. They were too weak to raise themselves up and consequently perished on the ice. The sound of the screams assault Blagodarova's memory causing a collision between her present and former self. Again, in this case, the story appears not to have fully healed the initial wound.

The defining experience for Lodkin, Velezhova, Cherapukhin and others though was that of crossing a threshold. Nicholas Chare discusses the symbolism of the phrase: 'Mind the gap'. Broadcast regularly on the London underground it warns travellers to 'look out for something, to attend to something, to heed the gap'. Chare describes the gap as both 'a way through and an impediment, both a help and a hindrance'⁷².

⁷⁰ Gabriele Schwab, 'Writing against Memory and Forgetting', (p.97).

⁷¹ Faina Blagodarova, *Blokada, Oktiabr*'.

⁷² Nicholas Chare, 'The Gap in Context: Giorgio Agamben's Remnants of Auschwitz', *Cultural Critique*, 64 (Autumn 2006), 40-68 (p. 40).

Evacuees from besieged Leningrad received no such warning. They were simply removed from one situation and placed in another. Tat'iana Letenkova found herself in the remote Kungur region of Kazakhstan. She was confused and recalled harbouring a deep dislike of her new unfamiliar surroundings⁷³.

Evacuees were trapped within the course of unfolding events and could not view their experiences from an objective distance. In Leningrad they had experienced that 'zone of indistinction' between life and death⁷⁴. Now, the *doroga zhizni* became a purgatory realm 'between the inside and the outside'⁷⁵. Like Corporal Hodges, stunned by the almost 'unreasonable' suddenness of the Armistice in 1918 evacuees also had to come to terms with the reality that 'it was all over' and that like Hodges they were still alive and 'had a life to live'⁷⁶.

Nina Kovaleva, like Viktoriia Ruslanova was evacuated to the Urals. At one point someone handed her a piece of gingerbread and she was stunned that it had not been cut up into smaller pieces. She became even more confused when she was asked if it was 'tasty'. This threw her into a quandary. 'I did not understand. I remember sitting and asking myself what does this mean tasty or not tasty? What is this choice between eating and not eating? ...What is this phrase: 'I do not want to eat?' Kovaleva recalled that during the siege a desperate

⁷³ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 14.

⁷⁴ See also 'Between Myth and History: Siege Testimonies as 'Historiographic Metafiction' (pp. 29-30).

⁷⁵ Nicholas Chare, 'The Gap in Context...' (p. 61).

⁷⁶ See also p. 8.

voice rose up within her which wanted to scream out loud the words, 'Mama, I am hungry!' The concept of choosing whether to eat or not was deemed incomprehensible and immoral⁷⁷.

Kovaleva heard other evacuees discussing how 'bread rises'. Late one night she stole off out into the fields and dug a deep hole convinced that she would unearth a fresh loaf. A stranger saw her and asked her what she was doing. She then recalls being given a meal by the stranger who explained to her how bread was actually made.

Crossing the threshold also opened up emotional wounds which evacuees had suppressed during the siege when survival was paramount. Lidiia Usova did not remember either laughing or crying during the siege. 'People, even children didn't cry or smile...the grief was too great for tears'. It was only after her arrival in Zhikharev that she began to smile again⁷⁸. Similarly, Mikhail Kuraev stressed that normal emotions were absent during the siege. His mother was so focussed upon survival that she did not weep after the loss of either her mother or her other son. Kuraev recalls that it was only in late March after their evacuation to Cherepovtsha that his mother first cried⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga*, pp. 199-200.

⁷⁸ Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *Blokadnaia Kniga* ...p. 193.

⁷⁹ Mikhail Kuraev, 'Svediteli Neizbezhnogo, *Blokada kak Khudozhestvennaia Realnost*'.

CONCLUSION

Tat'iana Letenkova when recalling the ice road across lake Ladoga stated simply that 'The *doroga zhizni* saved us'⁸⁰. Yet, she recalled her own evacuation as an unpleasant experience and regarded her temporary home in Kongur as strange and unwelcoming. Lidiia Blagodarova stood in stunned silence in the decimated station of Bologoi while Aleksandr Cherapukhin grasped onto his family gramophone player as a symbol of all that was comforting and familiar.

Evacuation narratives depict feelings of confusion, incomprehension and fear yet, as a transportation route the ice road bore the possibility of ultimate redemption from the siege. Its continued resonance is one of ambivalence. *Blokadniki* are profoundly grateful for its existence but the resonance of the ice road's story is one of sacred horror. Though the *doroga zhizni* continues to be sacralised and canonised in siege testimony it remains a *lieu de memoire*, or site of memory which assaults the present and opens up wounds which have still not healed over the intervening decades.

Evacuation narratives also depict the dissolution of the *sensuscommunis* which encapsulates that sense of shared responsibility recalled by *blokadniki* as a defining aspect of their 'imagined' community. Peg Birmingham writes

⁸⁰ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 1.

that 'the modern political space is marked by an abyss opened by the loss of its theological underpinnings'⁸¹. She also cites Hanna Arendt's assertion that representations of heaven and hell represent our deepest longings and fears⁸². Memories of the *doroga zhizni* bring together both the longing and fears of evacuees.

While recollections of evacuation bring with them memory of various images and flashbacks the *doroga zhizni* also exists 'between signs'. It is therefore a 'a trace, a rhythm, an excess or disturbance that destabilises and threatens to undermine all signifying processes'⁸³. It is a subject for survivors which is 'both pleasurable and painful' as it remains 'both the source of creation and meaning and of absence, estrangement, desolation'⁸⁴. Through its inherent ambivalence as a signifier it also represents 'the heterogeneity that exists at the very heart of the self'⁸⁵. In this regard, the narrative of the *doroga zhizni*, more than any other siege story encapsulates that sense of ambiguity which characterises Giorgio Agamben's definition of the sacred.

⁸¹⁻⁸² Peg Birmingham, 'Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil', *Hypatia*, 18: 1 (Winter 2003), 80-103 (pp. 83-84). Birmingham is citing: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), pp. 446-47.

⁸³⁻⁸⁴ Peg Birmingham, 'Holes of Oblivion...' (pp. 91 and 90).

⁸⁵ Peg Birmingham, 'Holes of Oblivion...' (p. 91).

POD ZNAKOM “*MONETIZATSII*”

This concluding chapter examines siege veterans’ attitudes to contemporary Russian society. It moves the discussion into the present era providing a brief analysis of *blokadnikis*’ current concerns as well as some conclusions about the recent controversy surrounding *monetizatsiia*. The introduction of this policy which proposed the replacement of a range of state benefits with a single cash payment has proved to be extremely controversial amongst veterans. Many elderly people are still recovering from the currency crises of the 1990’s and remain skeptical about the stability of the Russian ruble. The controversy also stirred up debates amongst veterans about how Russia should care for the elderly and whether the legacy of the Great Patriotic War remains as valued today as it has been in previous decades.

Respondents were asked whether they felt they were treated fairly by the present government and whether they thought that their wartime sacrifices were acknowledged by younger generations. In response, almost all of them stated that they were reasonably content with their pensions but that they were less sure as to whether younger Russians fully appreciated the history

of the blockade. Aleksandra Arkhipova, Elena Vishnevskaja and several others expressed a sense of appreciation for the fact that Vladimir Putin came from St. Petersburg. Arkhipova was particularly aware of Stalin's antagonism towards the city and thought that as Putin was from St. Petersburg this would ensure a better future¹. It became clear during the interviews that Putin's connection with St. Petersburg, while primarily symbolic for veterans was a source of hope because during the Communist era Leningrad had often been viewed with suspicion by Soviet leaders.

Commemorative occasions remained a source of great pride. These veterans clearly valued small yet symbolic gestures. Vishnevskaja laid out her medals pointing to the 'Medal for the Defence of Leningrad', 'Medal for Residents of Besieged Leningrad', 'Medal Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of Victory' and so on². For all of these veterans each medal had a particular meaning and significance.

Natalia Velezhova and Tat'iana Letenkova were a little more sceptical about the current situation in Russia. Nevertheless, Letenkova still appreciated the fact that St. Petersburg appeared to be turning back

¹ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 11.

² BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side A, transcript, p. 1.

towards its pre-revolutionary heritage. She was pleased for example that old street names were gradually being re-introduced.³

Natalia Velezhova was critical of the policy of *monetizatsiia* stating that, 'Well, we used to get free transport. Now we have to pay for it. Why they did this I really cannot say. But, well, the real old Leningraders ...there are hardly any of them left'. Nevertheless, Viktor Lodkin who took part in the same discussion presented an opposing view. 'Well, you could get medication for free but then you would go to the chemist and find that what you wanted was not in stock. Now we get money so we can just buy what we want. This is good. Free travel? So many old people are very weak. Where would they travel to?'⁴

Lodkin continued, 'Well, the government during the last few years has sent us beautiful postcards. These postcards are signed by President Putin. Putin and the governor send us postcards. We are also grateful for recent raises in our pensions. Well, our generation, every generation lives for themselves. We were honest...How we cried when Josef Vissarionovich died. The younger

³ BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, pp. 14-15.

⁴ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

generation do not pay much attention to us. At the tram stop there used to be a sign stating that, “This place is for participants and invalids of the Great Patriotic War”. Well, if someone old got on a young person would give them their seat. Now, this practically never happens’⁵.

Lodkin, like Vishnevskaja stressed his appreciation for the fact that Putin signed commemorative postcards personally. Yet, he also expresses a feeling of regret that the younger generation in his view no longer fully appreciate the sacrifices made by the older generation. Interestingly, he emphasises the belief that his generation were ‘honest’. As an example, he cites how they all wept following Stalin’s death. This example is referred to as proof of genuine emotions and attachments which is contrasted by the transitory concerns of younger generations.

The former workers in the *Elektrosila* plant expressed similar sentiments.

Anna Sorokina stated, ‘Whoever has a “Medal for the Defence of Leningrad” has had their pension doubled’. Iurii Semeonovich continued, ‘Well, we referred to the cost of houses today in St. Petersburg and that the pension was enough for people to get by and that was it... Well, this question about Stalin. That generation when it comes to administration they could guarantee a certain standard of living for the people’⁶.

⁵ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side A, transcript, p. 11.

⁶ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 14.

Lodkin and Semeonovich both brought the question back to the topic of Stalin. For Lodkin, the national outpouring of grief which occurred after his death was proof that his generation were 'honest'. Semeonovich, mentioned soaring house prices in today's Leningrad. While the other respondents in this group stated that the state pension was 'enough' both Lodkin and Semeonovich regarded it as too little. Semeonovich stated that it was 'enough to get by and that was it'⁷. The most notable statement he made related to the competence of the wartime administration. He also refers to the maintenance of living standards during the Communist era and that this was guaranteed. Lodkin, Semeonovich, Velezhova and others were also adamant that maintenance of discipline and a gift for organisation distinguished the wartime administration from today's politicians⁸.

Clearly, this question initiated responses which are tinged with feelings of nostalgia for the previous era. Perhaps the most revealing statement was made by Gachina who asserted that 'Stalin's steadfastness was genuine...when he died why did we cry? Because it seemed to mean the end of the country... Well, my generation, we loved our youth and our twenties'⁹. Gachina, like Lodkin and Semeonovich again links this question with the subject of Stalin's death. The importance of this event was passionately emphasised by the veterans in Kolpino and again they stressed that their feelings at the time were entirely genuine.

⁷ BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 21.

⁸ BL11/JC/ /09/06/AIVB, side B, transcript, p. 17.

⁹ BL3/JC/06/03/SG, side B, transcript, p. 14.

Words such as ‘discipline’, ‘honesty’ and ‘concern’ stand out in these narratives. The older generation were ‘genuine’, ‘organised’ and ‘cared for one another’¹⁰. Veterans are clearly extracting nostalgic memories from the past which are contradicted by Arkhipova and Letenkova’s recollection of periods of political oppression¹¹. Viktoriia Ruslanova was also cautious when talking about Stalin and evidently retained little affection for the former leader¹².

¹⁰ Lidiia Blagodarova , BL9/JC/09/06/ES, side A, transcript, p. 14.

¹¹ Arkhipova described the period of the *Leningrad Affair* as a time when ‘everyone was crushed’. Letenkova’s father was imprisoned during the Stalinist era. BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 12 and BL7/JC/09/06/TL, side A, transcript, p. 8.

¹² BL6/JC/09/06/EVVR, side B, transcript, p. 19. See also “Za Rodinu! Za Stalina!” Myths of Patriotism in Contemporary Siege Discourse’ (p. 238).

COMMEMORATING VICTORY: THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY

Jakob Vogel states that nations are the product of images, myths and rituals which play a role in defining national characteristics. A sense of national identity is also forged through the coming together of 'emotional identifications and historical memory of the nation'¹³. No recent event in Russian history arouses more emotional identifications than the Great Patriotic War. As Nurit Schleifman states 'the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War differed from all previous victories, even surpassing the "Patriotic War" of 1812. It was turned into a major constitutive element of Soviet self-representation, as evidence for the concretely singular quality of the New Soviet Man, whose consciousness found its expression in this patriotic heroism'¹⁴.

Historical research has tended to separate 'collective memory' from 'individual memory'. 'Collective memory' has also often been regarded as synonymous with 'public memory' or 'national memory'¹⁵. There are also occasions when these two different aspects of memory intersect. For example, the victory day parade which took place in Red Square in Moscow in May 2005 to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of war in Europe was an occasion which brought

¹³ Jakob Vogel, 'The Search for the Nation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35:3 (July 2000), 501-11(p. 501).

¹⁴ Nurit Schleifman, 'Moscow's victory park: A monumental change', *History and Memory*, 13:2 (Autumn 2001), 5-34 (p. 6).

¹⁵ See also Tim Cole who asserted that it was more interesting to define where 'national' and 'individual memory' overlapped than to simply identify where the two differ from one another. Tim Cole, 'Scales of Memory, Layers of Memory: Recent Works on Memories of the Second World War and the Holocaust', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37:1 (2002), 129-38 (p. 131).

these different aspects of memory together. It was a celebration of the Red Army's greatest achievement and an opportunity for Russians, old and young to remember the Soviet Union's pivotal role in crushing Nazism. The striking images of Soviet era banners, flags, tanks and passing columns of veterans dressed in wartime uniform created a simulacrum of a bygone era. These celebrations also have an 'an integrative function' as they give the nation a 'common identity around which society' can come together¹⁶.

Catherine Merridale writes, 'From the 1960's, the Great Patriotic War provided the most important images. The memory of it was genuinely sacred for whole generations'¹⁷. Yet, *monetizatsiia* has sparked a vehement debate which poses uncomfortable questions about Russia's treatment of her war veterans. Behind the veneer of unity and the apparent cohesion of both 'individual' and 'national memory' lie distinct societal fissures.

If the memory of the Great Patriotic War is sacred for the Russian people then the treatment of her war heroes should also be considered sacrosanct. In the eyes of many veterans Vladimir Putin's reforms of the pension system are another indictment of post-Soviet Russia and an example of a perceived loss of *dusha*

¹⁶ Philip Boobbyer, 'Truth-telling, Conscience and Dissent in Late Soviet Russia: Evidence from Oral Histories', p. 554.

¹⁷ Catherine Merridale, 'Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38:1 (2003), 13-28 (p. 17).

(soul) or *dushevnost'* (soulfulness) which is associated with the implementation of a capitalist free market economy.

MONETIZATSIIA

'*Pod Znakom "Monetizatsii"* was a phrase recently coined by the journalist Boris Vishnevskii in January 2005¹⁸. Roughly translated it means 'under the symbol of "*monetizatsiia*" or perhaps more succinctly 'under the shadow of "*monetizatsiia*".

As stated above, *monetizatsiia* concerns the replacement of various benefits enjoyed by war veterans with a single cash payment. *Nevskoe Vremia* lists fifteen former benefits which were placed under threat as a consequence of Vladimir Putin's proposals to introduce cash payments¹⁹. These benefits include free medical care, free travel on public transport, assistance with the cost of repairs to living quarters and reductions in telephone bills.

Boris Vishnevskii remarked in the same article that on the cusp of a year when Russia would commemorate both the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the centenary of the 1905 revolution war veterans were in a state of consternation over their treatment by the state. Consequently, while a plethora of articles and broadcasts celebrating the exploits of the elderly generation were being disseminated across the Russian media veterans themselves were not only

¹⁸ This article appeared in the *Sankt Peterburgskii Kur'er* on 5 January 2005 <www.kurier.spb.ru> [accessed 25/08/2005].

¹⁹ Veronica Azarova, '*Blokadnik – Kategoriia, Ob'schaia Nevskoe Vremia*', 20 February 2004 <www.nv.vspb.ru> [accessed 25/08/2005].

reminiscing but preparing for action. In many cases, veterans' organisations expressed vociferous opposition to Vladimir Putin's proposals.

Roger D. Markwick discusses the idea of the Great Patriotic War as a prism through which 'Soviet society viewed itself'²⁰. Yet, at the same time Catherine Merridale reminds us that 'All Russian pensioners have seen their status and identity as Soviets overturned, they have lost their savings, lost the security of social provision, and witnessed a new generation, with alien ideas about money, community and politics, take over with ruthless energy'²¹. The introduction of *monetizatsiia* therefore appeared to many veterans to be a further erosion of the social provisions which they had hitherto taken for granted.

Their response was noted by the internet magazine *gazeta.ru* which reported in January 2005 that pensioners in over thirty regions of the Russian Federation had engaged in demonstrations and protests against *monetizatsiia*²². Similarly, *Novaia Gazeta* listed eighteen protests stretching from St. Petersburg in the west to Perm in Siberia which took place from 16 to 18 January 2005²³.

By far the largest of these protests took place in St. Petersburg itself where some 5000 demonstrators gathered to denounce *monetizatsiia*²⁴. The aim of the protest

²⁰ Roger D. Markwick, 'Stalinism at War' (p. 518).

²¹ Catherine Merridale, 'Redesigning History...' (p. 18).

²² German Prokhorov, Denis Bulanichev and Aleksandr Irdullin, 20 January 2005, <*Gazeta.Ru*>, [accessed 25/08/2005].

²³ Anna Levina and Ekaterina Ivanovna, *Vlast' Ne Daet No Reshila Brat: Kronika Protestov*, 20 January 2005 <*novayaGazeta.ru*> [accessed 25/08/2005].

²⁴ This figure was given by <*novayaGazeta.ru*> (same as previous footnote) although the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* gave an estimate of 15,000 participants. *Radiostantsiia Ekho Moskvy*, 15 January 2005 <www.echo.msk.ru/interview/33975/q.html> [accessed 25/08/2005].

was to bring traffic on *Nevskii Prospekt* to a standstill in order to convey their grievances. In other cities pensioners blocked the tram lines (Novosibirsk), the state highway to Moscow (Perm) and brought one entire city centre (Vologda) to a standstill. In most cases they protested simply against *monetizatsiia* but in several instances protests were held which campaigned for the restoration of free travel on public transport²⁵.

Pensioners concerns were eloquently expressed by one Marat Gleizer, himself a survivor of besieged Leningrad. He underlined concerns about fluctuating oil prices and regional variations in the costs of public transport which would not be addressed by a single cash payment. Transport was a key concern as he stated that he spent 1200 rubles a month on daily trips to visit family members. Invoking Communist ideology he asserted that this was a policy that was in the interests solely of all powerful capitalists rather than that of the working people²⁶.

In some cases the protests had the backing of opposition groups. The RKSM or Revolutionary Komsomol' supported veterans' concerns by holding a protest in April 2005 which denounced the government's proposals. The meeting took place outside the Finland Railway Station in St. Petersburg. The RKSM also

²⁵ These protests took place in Nizhnyi Novgorod, Naberezhnye Chel'ne and Krasnodar (same source as footnote no. 16).

²⁶ Marat Gleizer, '*Ocherednaia Podlost'*', *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, N75 (12549), 5 June 2004 <www.sovross.ru> [accessed 25/08/2005].

sought to give the protests a political edge, regarded as part of a wider campaign to reinstall Soviet style government ²⁷.

Not all veterans were against the proposal though. Liliia Guteva stated that, 'I am old. Where would I travel to? Anyway, I would prefer to pay with money when I travel'. Her husband concurred. 'You write out your medicine, go to the chemist and find out they don't have it. There is medicine in the market but I don't have the money to buy it'. These sentiments echo Viktor Lodkin's statement quoted above²⁸.

As the situation came to a head in January 2005 the journalist Viktor Rezunkov asked the question, 'What indeed can the government now do to stabilise the situation in the country?' Veterans called in to air their views with Rezunkov on Radio Svoboda. One St. Petersburg resident stated that in times when the country appeared to be degenerating into lawlessness it was timely to recall Andrei Sakharov's plea always to support the weak and the destitute²⁹.

²⁷ The Communist Party and the opposition movement *Iabloko* helped organise the demonstration in Perm mentioned above. MLP News also reported a day of protests on 2 August 2004 in St. Petersburg when pensioners organizations, The Communist Party and *Iabloko* joined forces. RSS channel, 2 August 2004 <<http://mlp.dax.ru/rss.xml>>, [accessed 25/08/2005]. Refer also to A. Vrednyi, *Bunt Syktyvkarskikh L'gotnikov*, 9 April 2005 <www.rksmb.ru>, [accessed 25/08/2005]. In addition, The National Bolshevik Party took part in some protests and in Saratov on 20 January 2005 when several of the party's members were detained by police. *Sankt Peterburg: Marsh Svobodnykh Liudei*, 30 January 2005 <www.nbp.nad.ru> [accessed 26/08/2005].

²⁸ Ivan Rodionov, *L'goti Zameniati Den'gami vesti nedeli*, 25 May 2004 <www.vesti.ru> [accessed 11/12/2006].

²⁹ Viktor Rezunkov, 'Shto Dolzhny Predpriniat' Vlasti delia togo, shtoby stabilizirovat' ostanovku v strane?' Radio "Svoboda", 27 January 2005 <http://yabloko.ru/Publ/2005/2005_01/050128_svob_vishnevsky.html> [accessed 11/12/2006].

It is not entirely surprising that pensioners have been so adept at voicing their concerns and organising protests. For some years veterans in various cities have been forming groups and organisations with the aim of keeping the memory of the Great Patriotic War alive and of raising funds to help elderly people who are experiencing financial hardship.

The society *Blokadnik* in Novosibirsk was formed in 1990 and is still flourishing today with around 860 members³⁰. A similar society (also called simply *Blokadnik*) was set up by former veteran Geli Bogoliubov in Krasnoyarsk in 1991 and in May 2005 *blokadniki* resident in Ekaterinburg joined with city administrators in an effort to establish a range of benefits for the elderly including free warm meals and assistance with repairs to family homes³¹.

During the controversy surrounding *monetizatsiia* veterans' organisations began to move into the political sphere. As demonstrated above their protests gained widespread attention in the Russian media. President Putin was also caught in the somewhat awkward position of presiding over preparations for the VE day celebrations while at the same time attempting to quell veterans' concerns. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, the respondents interviewed for this study appeared to be more focused upon inter-generational issues than specific details surrounding *monetizatsiia*. They expressed feelings of regret about

³⁰ *Informatsiia o Novosibirskoi oblastnoi obshchestvennoi organizatsii invalidov i pensionerov "Blokadnik"*, (no date provided) <Bigler. ru> [accessed 11/12/2006].

³¹ *Obshchestvo "Blokadnik": Istoriia sozdaniia pamniatnika "Detiam Blokady", Zemliaki - Pobediteli* <region.krasu.ru/article/814> [accessed 25/08/2005].

recent political upheavals but were not outwardly hostile towards the present administration. In this regard, *monetizatsiia* was of less concern to them than the belief that younger generations no longer appreciated their wartime service.

The connection made by Lodkin, Semeonovich and others between outpourings of grief following Stalin's death and the 'honesty' of their generation is particularly revealing. Martha Vicinus reminds us that the word nostalgia brings together the Greek words for 'return' and 'sorrow'³². Veterans like Lodkin appear to use expressions of nostalgia as a means of returning to cherished values. Implicit in these statements again is also an acknowledgement of *sostradanie* or co-suffering.

Vicinus regards our imagined past as embodying a 'supreme mythos'³³. In their nostalgic pronouncements about the Soviet era veterans are undoubtedly remembering some aspects of life under Communist rule while backgrounding others. In this regard they have 'reshaped' their memories into 'a more acceptable form'³⁴. Vicinus also reminds us that 'the nostalgic memory' is 'a tangible possession, the best evidence of one's special love'³⁵. In this case, a 'special love' is expressed for other members of the 'imagined' community who

³²⁻³³ Martha Vicinus, "A Legion of Ghosts": Vernon Lee (1856-1935) and the Art of Nostalgia', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10: 4 (2004), 599-616 (p. 600).

³⁴⁻³⁵ Martha Vicinus, "A Legion of Ghosts"... (p. 601).

understand the meaning of *sostradanie*. As Vicinus writes, we share our nostalgic memories ‘as a valuable lesson, not a negative experience of failure or lack’³⁶. Veterans may often feel that their wartime experiences have taught them something and that their recollections enable them to revisit a meaningful past.

The respondents were therefore ultimately attempting to express something much more complex than concerns about financial stability. They were more concerned about the perceived loss of *dushevnost’* across the generations.

Vicinus states that nostalgic memories are also ‘carefully honed re-creations of happy or miserable moments’ which are “inviolable”, unchangeable’³⁷.

Above all they are sentiments which ‘unite friends’³⁸. Consequently, nostalgia helps create communities. It is an expression of ‘mutual love’ and of unspoken understanding. Ultimately, such mutual affirmation retains far more resonance amongst *blokadniki* than transient concerns about *monetizatsiia* or reforms in the benefit system.

³⁶⁻³⁸ Martha Vicinus, “A Legion of Ghosts”... (p. 609).

CONCLUSION

The St. Petersburg City Council of Veterans according to Lisa A. Kirschenbaum estimated in 2003 that around six hundred siege survivors currently reside in the city¹. Of those, only sixty were said to have endured the entire blockade. During the course of this study over forty blockade veterans' organisations in St.Petersburg were contacted. Their continued existence appears to suggest that these figures may be too low. Nevertheless, it is evident that the number of survivors continues to dwindle. In addition, many survivors are in poor health due to siege related illnesses.

Correspondingly, as opportunities for interviewing survivors are increasingly rare it is more necessary than ever to record previously undocumented stories. Nevertheless, such an undertaking is not without its challenges. For example, to what extent might *blokadniki* be romanticising the past after so many years? Are they screening out memories which undermine the myth of the 'hero city'? How can they continue to express nostalgic feelings about the leadership of Stalin when historical evidence confirms that he was a ruthless dictator?

First of all, the opening passages of these testimonies confront the grim realities of siege life head on. Veterans are also remembering the resonance of Stalin's leadership from an earlier time in their lives and are not necessarily

¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad...* p. 296. The data is taken from the article – 'Sixtieth Anniversary of the Day When Blockade of Leningrad Was Broken Through', *Pravda. RU*, 18 January 2003 <<http://english.pravda.ru/region/2003/01/18/4226.html>> [accessed 12/12/2006].

expressing their current views on this topic. On the other hand, they appear to yearn for the certainties of their youth and an era valued for its perceived stability and community spirit. While such continued attachments might be regarded as somewhat controversial it is not the object of this study to challenge *blokadniki's* belief-systems but to gain a deeper understanding of them.

These narratives comprise of a web of personal details, stories about friends and family, historical references and valedictory statements. Yet, the overall pace of the monologues was fluent and uninterrupted. In addition, respondents saw no contradiction between the squalor of blockade life and the myth of a united wartime community. Graphic depictions of suffering brought home to respondents the achievement of having survived, and most importantly, of having survived together.

Siege discourse may also be mythic discourse but it does not entail a journey away from reality. For survivors, the myths of everyday siege life make the past *more* not less real to them. Myth is primarily an explanative tool which helps them navigate a clear passage through their memories. Bearing witness is also a considerable responsibility, especially in front of fellow veterans.

Add to this repeated references made to the sacrality of their narratives and it becomes clear that respondents are unlikely to falsify their testimonies.

The Russian government continues to canonise *blokadniki* as *homines sacri* on commemorative occasions . The brutal realities of war torn Leningrad also confirm Giorgio Agamben's observation that the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented level of systematic violence. Siege testimonies bring the sacred and the profane together demonstrating that they are mutually interdependent parts of the story as a whole. From *agon* to *agnorisis*, survivors are sharing a journey with us which charts what it is like to 'confront one's own death in the everyday'².

Referring to the author's place of residence Aleksandra Arkhipova asserted, 'Well, it could have happened in Edinburgh. But it didn't. It happened to us. It was a unique era. We survived for 900 days. More than a million people died. That is a fact. You just cannot get away from it. No one, not anyone should be allowed to forget it'³.

² N. Wyatt, 'The Mythic Mind' (pp. 8-9).

³ BL1/JC/04/03/AA, side A, transcript, p. 12.

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